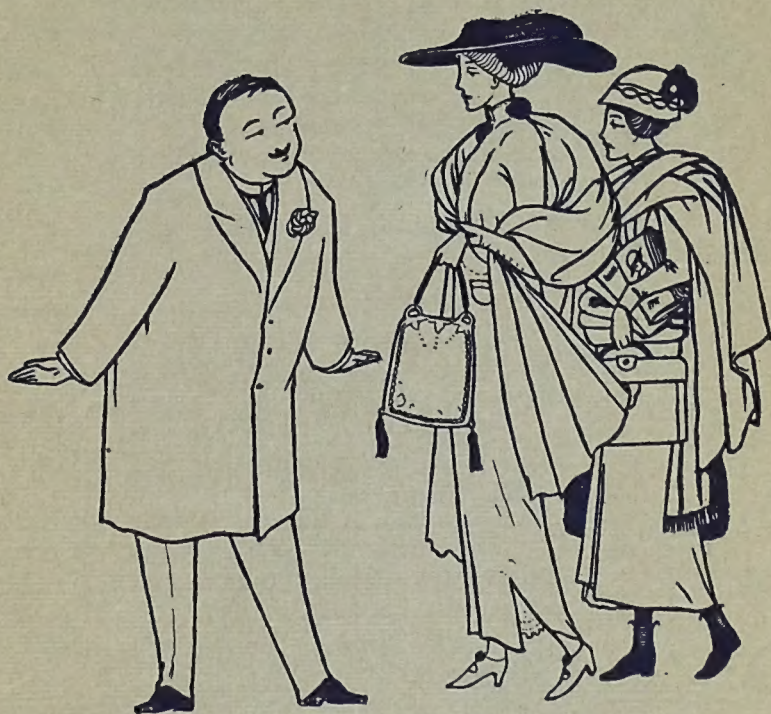




The Courier.

*The Lady of Fashion.
Her Maid.*



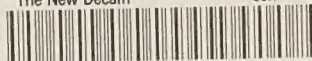
*The Master-Printer. The Detective's
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*The
Bureaucrat.*

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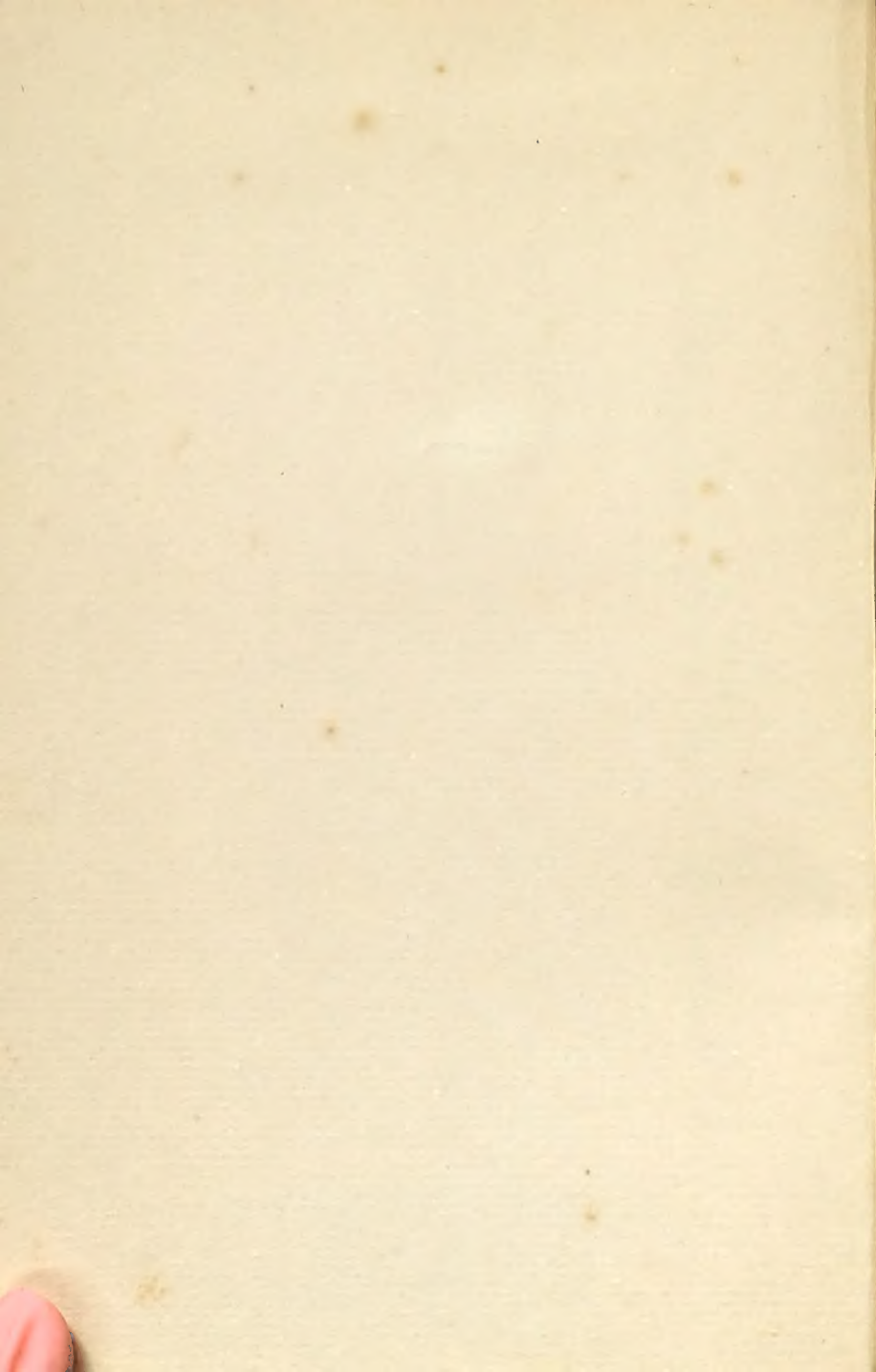
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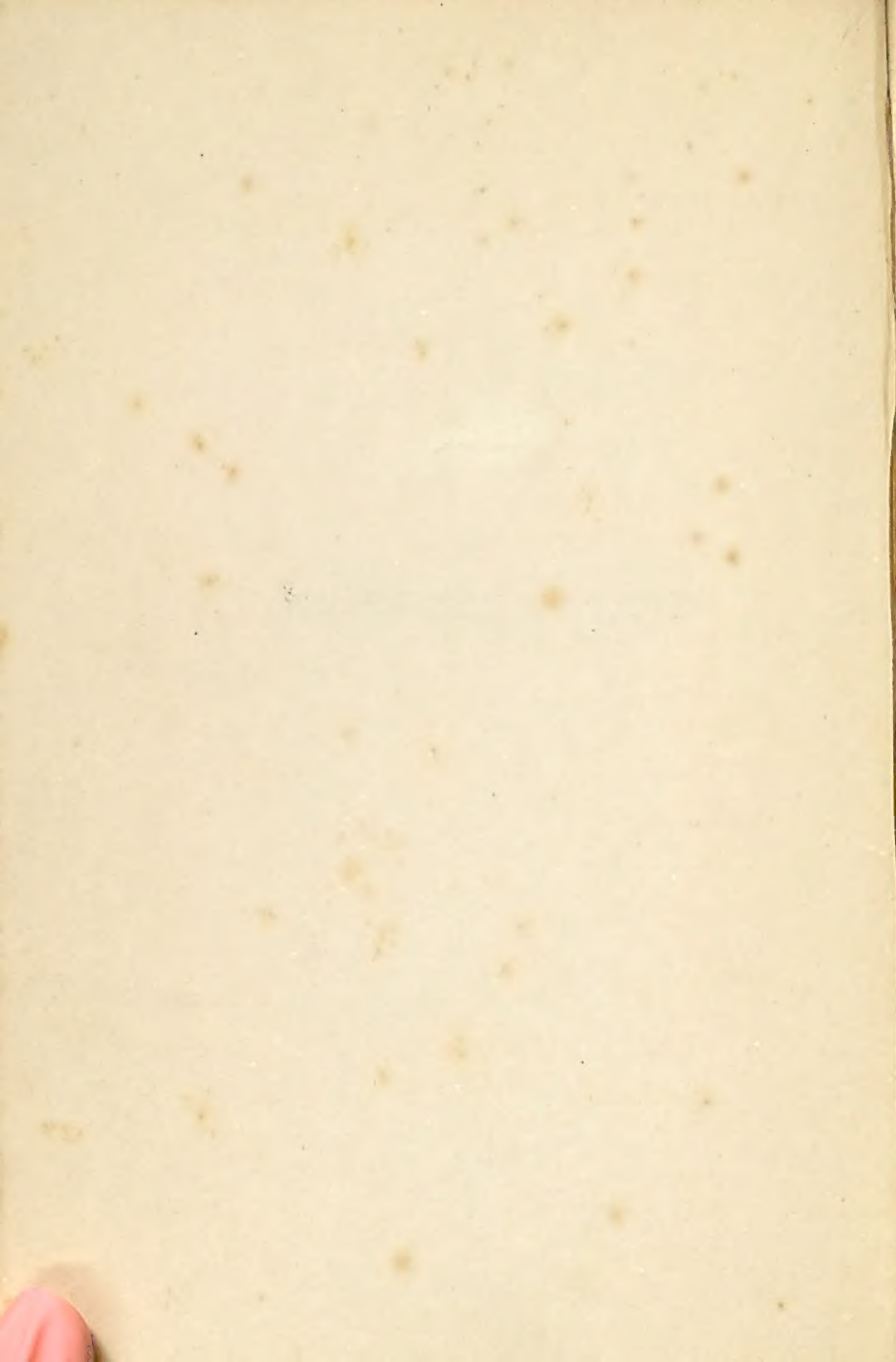
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THE NEW DECAMERON



THE NEW DECAMERON
VOLUME THE SECOND, CONTAINING
THE SECOND DAY

OXFORD
BASIL BLACKWELL
1920

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CONTENTS

			PAGE
PRELUDE			1
THE COURIER'S SECOND TALE	JIM OF MOLOCH'S BAR	<i>By Francis Carco</i>	9
THE LADY OF FASHION'S SECOND TALE	BREAD UPON THE WATERS	<i>By Michael Sadleir</i>	20
THE MASTER- PRINTER'S SECOND TALE	THE HISTORY OF ANDREW NIGGS	<i>By Basil Blackwell</i>	31
INTERLUDE			41
THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S SECOND TALE	THE TOOL	<i>By W. F. Harvey</i>	54
THE PRIEST'S SECOND TALE	THE MASTER- THIEF	<i>By Dorothy L. Sayers</i>	76
THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE	THE AFFAIR OF THE MUL- HAVEN BABY	<i>By M. Nightingale</i>	82
THE POET'S TALE	THE VASE	<i>By Camilla Doyle</i>	129
THE PROFESSOR'S SECOND TALE	"ONCE UPON A TIME"	<i>By Bill Nobbs</i>	152

CONTENTS

			PAGE
THE WOMAN DOCTOR'S	A PLAYER	<i>By M. Storm</i>	
SECOND TALE . . .	PERFORCE . . .	<i>Jameson</i> . . .	158
THE BUREAUCRAT'S	SALVATOR	<i>By Sherard</i>	
SECOND TALE . . .	STREET . . .	<i>Vines</i> † . . .	176
CLIMAX			183
PRESS OPINIONS OF THE "FIRST DAY" (Tabulated in order to facilitate the fixing of a general critical standard) .			184

PRELUDE

OWING to a mishap to their private yacht, Hector Turpin and the strange company that formed his first Continental touring-party had reached their port of destination too late for the train which should, according to programme, have taken them on their way. As frequently occurs, the unexpected check had lulled the *Wanderlust* of some members of the group, so that they emerged from the comfortable bedrooms of their hotel desirous of spending "a quiet morning pottering about," and wholly unresponsive to time-tables and guide-books and the enthusiasm of their more restless fellow-tourists.

Chance brought Turpin to their side and, with the reinforcement of the Courier himself, the potterers won the day. With a view to economy, Turpin had borrowed from an impecunious but poetical acquaintance the steam-yacht that had carried the party from England. In return he had promised the lender gratuitous inclusion in the tour. The young man, cursed with a yacht he disliked and feared, and with a talent for verse to which the world had hitherto shown a cool indifference, was to have joined the party on

PRELUDE •

their arrival at the French port. The prospect of some weeks' comfortable existence and the hope of congenial company had stifled his usual unpunctuality. He had been on the quay at the arranged hour. After waiting in vain for half the afternoon, he had conceived a lyric vision of a fishing fleet, and hastened to a quiet café to complete gestation. When at last the yacht arrived, he was nowhere to be found. The Courier had no address to guide him. Either his poet-friend was in the town or he was not. Each alternative necessitated waiting. Hence it was that he ranged himself with those who wished to idle their time away in the deep, grey-green passages between the old houses by the harbour, to dawdle about curiosity shops, to suck cool, vivid drinks through straws. He was careful that no one should suspect the real reason for his acceptance of delay. Obviously, the yacht transaction could not be made public. He hoped, a little despairingly, that the poet would be discreet.

After breakfast, when departure had been finally postponed, the party split into groups. Mrs. Dane-Vereker, as befitted a lady of fashion, was for *antiquaires* and old china and possible embroideries. Mr. Scott (of the Psychological Research Society), who collected snuff-boxes, and Mr. Vivian Spencer (of the Foreign Office), who collected prints, elected to accompany her. Miss Pogson, resentful of the delay and determined on her money's worth, set out to see churches, museums, and—if there were any—Roman remains. Her fervour kindled Mr. Buck, the retired

PRELUDE •

master-printer, who regarded architecture as his hobby since the first brick was laid of that astonishing villa-residence (now in the process of building) in which he hoped to end his days.

"If you will allow me, ma'am," he said with ceremony, "I will accompany you on your stroll. I have for long been parshul to the Rinacens style."

The Schoolmarm, unaware that Mr. Buck believed this to be the French for "baronial," consented graciously.

Mr. Peter Brown, æsthetic nondescript, favoured bookshops and queer corners and an occasional drink. Also he preferred to see churches without hearing their history read aloud, and the poise of Miss Pogson's guide-book promised much study of the past. Dr. Mary Pennock nodded agreement and looked inquiringly towards Father Anthony. The clergyman excused himself.

"I feel the heat," he said. "Perhaps I might join you later in the day? I shall read quietly at the hotel."

The remaining member of the party—Professor Barnabas MacWhirter-Smith—was nowhere to be found. His friend the Psychical Researcher remembered that the learned gentleman had made some reference to papyri in the library of the local University. It was decided to await his reappearance with composure.

The Courier smiled on his clients' plans.

"Excellent!" he cried. "And I have some correspondence and other business which will occupy me until after noon. May I suggest that

PRELUDE ●

we all meet for lunch at the *Poisson Bleu* on the harbour front? It is a characteristic port café of an old type, free from the cosmopolitan vulgarities of the smart restaurants, full of amusing types, and famous for its Burgundy."

On this understanding the travellers dispersed, leaving Mr. Turpin delighted at this fortunate respite.

"Now I can try and find this good-for-nothing rhymester," he thought. And, leaving the hotel by the back door, he began a systematic search of the various obscure haunts likely to lure a person of the temperament and poverty of the missing poet.

The day was very hot, and the various members of the party converged by midday on the cooler streets that faced the harbour, until all but the Courier and the Professor were collected under the striped awning of the *Poisson Bleu*.

It was far from being the finest café of the city. Indeed, as a convivial resort, the place was dingy enough, with the brasswork of the mushroom tables dull for want of polishing, and the imitation leather seats betraying their falsity by shameless peeling. But the outlook was a thousand times more subtle than of the Grande Place, and from the sea a fresh breeze swayed the stifling heat, that had fallen like a portentous curtain on the town.

"Drinks!" gasped Peter Brown. "I am parched. Father Anthony would be all the better for an *apéritif*, and Vivian looks so pleased with himself that, unless his mouth is stopped with

PRELUDE ●

something, we shall have a lecture on Le Blond ovals."

Mr. Spencer sniffed.

"Bad painters are apt to be funny about engravings," he retorted.

A patient waiter tarried on their argument. There followed the usual patter of conflicting orders. Several of the party fancied their French, which made comprehension more difficult. Indeed, only the emphatic "Beer!" of the Master-Printer made an impression on the listener's mind. Shrewdly suspecting that an array of bottles with small-type labels and glasses of various shape would meet the case, he withdrew and made his own selection at the bar. A better knowledge of the British Foreign Office would have spared him a slight brush with Vivian Spencer, who pointed out that Picon Citron is not light red, and that, when he ordered a drink by name, he named the drink he wanted.

A shrill "Ah-ah!" in the Gallic fashion interrupted the spasmodic exchange of platitude with which the party, after the withdrawal of the waiter, were dividing one sip from another. Mr. Turpin, gesticulating cheerfully and wearing an incredible Panama hat, picked his way through the small tables towards his flock. Behind him slouched an untidy youth with a wide-brimmed, soft black hat and a flowing tie.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the Courier, "may I present my friend, Valentine Herrick, poet and Bohemian?"

The newcomer bowed awkwardly, and his soft

PRELUDE ●

brown eyes, like those of a timid animal, sought nervously for a sympathetic face among this formidable crowd of English strangers. He decided that only Peter Brown was not wholly terrifying; in which he erred, for Miss Pogson had, in intention, assumed the expression of a Phryne, and Father Anthony could not help the intimidating influence of his clerical dress. Certainly Vivian Spencer made no attempt to conceal his scorn for a man who wore a tie like a sponge-bag, and Mrs. Dane-Vereker, intent on smoke rings, did not acknowledge the new arrival in any way; but both, defensibly enough, were conforming to the standards of their class, and throwing by instinct the onus of social "making good" on to the stranger who had crossed their path.

"Have you seen the Professor, Mr. Turpin?" asked Henry Scott.

"But no! He has vanished utterly. I left word at the hotel. I can only hope that he will follow us."

"What about lunch?" asked Dr. Pennock.
"I'm hungry."

The Courier burst into an eruption of orders. In five minutes a large table was pieced together and yards of bread had been invisibly divided into three-inch sections. Food—and most excellent food—followed. Satisfaction at the choice of restaurant was loudly expressed.

"I expect you know all the good cafés in France, Mr. Turpin," said Miss Pogson.

"Hardly all, my dear lady, but many. And some bad ones," he added meaningly.

PRELUDE ♣

"Real frizzlers, some o' these caffy chongtongs, eh?" asked the Master-Printer, oblivious of his yesterday's failure with the *Moulin Rouge*.

Mrs. Dane-Vereker giggled.

"Oh, Mr. Buck, don't embarrass the poor man! We drove him to reminiscence last night."

"But I want to *hear*!" wailed the Schoolmarm, now convinced that French life was only comprehensible if one believed the worst of everybody.

"Perhaps Mr. Turpin will select?" suggested the Psychical Researcher.

"On one condition," replied the Courier smiling; "that I am to-day the first, as yesterday I was the last, of a round of story-tellers."

Each member of the party being secretly rather pleased with his effort of the day before, this challenge was received with a noisy but insincere protest, carefully timed to die away before it could carry any dangerous conviction.

"You promise?" asked the Courier. "Then I will gossip a few minutes of cafés and their inmates. It is not mere prosiness on my part, for the café is the stage of the myriad comedies and tragedies of France and—well, yesterday, it was Paris, to-day it shall be (let us say) Marseilles. I may not tell you the actual town, but it is a seaport. In excuse for inconclusiveness I can only plead that I am no story-teller, that the things related are things seen, and that little bits of truth are apt to have ragged edges. Now you are warned, and, when you have filled your glasses,

PRELUDE

you will have no reasonable cause to complain of
being deceived in or caught unawares by

“ THE COURIER’S SECOND TALE.”

He settled back in his chair, drew the first smoke
of his cigar and began.

JIM OF MOLOCH'S BAR

I CAN see Jim now as he was on that only evening of our acquaintanceship, a fine-looking fellow enough with his short black moustache, his hard eyes, his great forehead, and the flecks of grey at his temples. Nobody seemed to know him at Moloch's, and certainly he was a complete stranger to us, for all that we had met him at eleven o'clock near the markets, and shared his taxi to the strange little dram-shop on the harbour front.

Jim stood drinks round and I followed suit. Then each began paying for himself, and conversation, which had limped a little, became general and took a turn to the picturesque and abbreviated, as it always will among men who have found their way back from no small number of illusions.

"Of course women——" began someone.

We exchanged a vague smile.

"... Are a queer lot down this way," remarked another.

Jim nodded slowly and studied the toes of his boots. The speaker enlarged on his theme. All around us, at little tables or sitting at the bar, the girls sat with their cheap drinks before them. They took no part in the conversation, but, as

THE COURIER'S SECOND TALE

it were, followed with their eyes what we were saying. Jim was frankly not listening. He was so far away, so lost in reflection, that clearly only his own initiative could bring him back to us.

"Let's go," he said suddenly.

We left the bar and wandered towards the town and its thousand lights. Despite the moon, the sky seemed lowering in comparison with the shining pavements. I had a sudden impression that night and day had got out of step and were both happening at once. We drifted into another café and settled down to a fresh round of drinks. He who had been favouring us with his views on women *remettait ça*, as they say in the Place Blanche, and wandered off shamelessly into the most extravagant confessions.

I nudged Jim with my elbow.

"He's been a gay dog, hasn't he?" I whispered audibly.

The expert gave me an angry glance and subsided. Jim laid his large and carefully manicured hands on the table before him.

"Women," he said slowly, "leave them alone! You know enough, as I do, to——"

"To?"

"Oh, nothing," he replied, it seemed regretfully. "Only that the reason why I went with you to Moloch's this evening—a place where once I was well known enough—and the reason why I made you come away so suddenly were the same and—well, a woman . . ."

We looked mute inquiry.

"She was called Irma," Jim continued musingly,

JIM OF MOLOCH'S BAR

"and three of the boys, who called themselves l'Empereur, Tire Bouchon, and Petit Flic (don't worry about derivations; you are too young) nearly went crazy trying to get in with her. I had her for two years, that girl; two whole years. Not bad? Then she did me down."

"After two years?"

Jim nodded.

"They all do it eventually, and Irma was no exception. I'd have made something of her, if she'd stuck it a bit longer. But there—the harm was done. I met her one night in the street soon after, took her into Moloch's and told her a few things. She handed me a lot of back-chat, but I let her talk; they get ideas in their heads. But when her new fancy came in and tried to come the landlord over me, I'd had enough, and let him have a couple of bullets in the guts. That finished him. Then, to tide the matter off, I gave her two as well. And there I left them."

We were silent. Jim gazed commandingly at the bar, with its crowd of girls, its wailing orchestra, its dazzling lights multiplied many fold by the mirrored walls.

"It's a lonely place," he remarked quietly.

He looked at his watch and rose suddenly, throwing three louis on the table.

"Going?" we cried, as he fumbled with his coat.

"I'm off by the 1.30 to Paris. Not much time. But I wanted to see the old place. I've been abroad some years. I'm in business, you know. Good-night, all!"

THE COURIER'S SECOND TALE ●

And he vanished, leaving us wondering who and what he was. One of the girls came over to our table.

"Where's your friend?" she asked.

"Know him?"

"'M. He's a type and no mistake. I don't see him often, but we've had a drink together several times, and he tells me apache stories and how he killed his girl. Makes me laugh. As if a fellow would tell anyone, if he had actually done the things he says!"

For a while we sat and argued. I was unconvinced. Jim's manner had not been that of a teller of tales. The rest veered round, however, and claimed that they had always been unconvinced.

"The fellow was obviously a liar," said the expert on women, and his bitterness was full of rankling memory.

We parted, still quarrelling.

Then, the next morning, everyone was talking of the murder at Moloch's. A man and a woman were dead, but of the culprit there was no trace. A few nights later, with three friends and a couple of girls, I found myself in the bar known as "Jack's." Only someone familiar with the network of alleys which lie behind the Marseilles docks can picture the kind of stew it was. A dirty little place enough, facing the water, with an unshaded oil lamp smoking on the counter and chipped glasses of every shape out of which, somewhat reluctantly, one sipped bad, smuggled whisky. But for some reason we affected to like

JIM OF MOLOCH'S BAR

the place and went there frequently. As we came in, a man was passing from the bar into the gloomy horror of Jack's back room. The carriage of the figure and the set of the coat were somehow familiar. I groped among my recollections. Conversation turned on the affair at Moloch's. Of course M. Jack might not have read the newspapers, which were devoting daily two columns or more to the mystery, but the astonishment he showed at hearing of the event struck me somehow as artificial.

"Do you mean to say you have not heard?" I asked.

He pulled himself together.

"Of course, of course," he replied, and he was clearly doing his best to speak naturally. "A Marseillais, wasn't it, called Maspré? And a girl they speak of as Irma? How are the police progressing? A bright lot, the police."

He crushed on a table-top the dead cigarette-end which he held between his fingers and added:

"Doing nothing I suppose, the police?"

"Oh the police . . ." I said.

"Mind you," Jack went on, staring through the window in the direction of the harbour, "mind you, I'm not saying anything against the place, but, between ourselves, Moloch's"—he shrugged his shoulders—"is a——"

"Hark at him!" cried a fat girl in the corner. She was always delighted to hear foul words because they reminded her of her childhood.

"Shut your mouth over there!" cried one of

THE COURIER'S SECOND TALE

the men. "Georgina is going to sing. Fetch your guitar, Jack, if she's in working order."

Georgina had a fine voice, but she was too ready to oblige, and we got rather tired of hearing her. Fat Maud had a voice like a trickle of vinegar, but she resented her suppression none the less.

"Ugh! Georgina!" she sneered. "A little treacle!"

The guitar twanged and Georgina began :

"A l'heure où dans les bars de nuit
Rita la blonde . . ."

Under cover of the song Maud crossed the room and leant over my chair.

"What were you talking about just now to the patron?"

Jack himself condescended to reply.

"About Moloch's, my dear. Now shut up and listen to Georgina singing."

"What about Moloch's?" insisted Maud.

Jack's mouth twitched oddly, but he made as though he had not heard the girl's second question. He turned his back on her and devoted his attention to his guitar and to Georgina. His eyes gleamed in his withered face.

"Be quiet," I said to Maud in a low voice.

She leant nearer to me and I felt the bizarre charm of her great, amiable presence, so oddly preponderant in this dirty little seaside bar.

"Let us go," she urged, in a voice loud enough for Jack to hear. "Let us go to Moloch's. I want to see it. 'Specially since the murder. . . ."

JIM OF MOLOCH'S BAR

"Keep clear of the place," said M. Jack, without turning his head. "Keep clear of it and don't be a fool. All this business . . ."

"Yes . . . ?"

But Jack seemed once more in the grip of the song, and was listening with feverish absorption to the imbecilities which Georgina continued to pour forth. Maud and I stared through the window at the black desolation of water. The song ended. Jack went to fetch more drink and, on his return, the excitement that I had noticed when first we came in seemed once again to have got possession of him. He came and sat by my side and, clearly referring to the song which had just been sung, muttered :

"They were singing that over there."

"Over there ?"

"At Moloch's . . . I . . . I . . . used to go there, you know. There were evenings when I had to see people. Here, except now and again a few soldiers, the company is not—well, not exactly—you know what I mean. So sometimes I would shut up after the nine o'clock call had sounded and go off there. What a crowd ! Lots to drink, and gypsies playing that very tune that madame has just sung. Dancing . . ."

"Gypsies !" interrupted Maud. "Were there gypsies at Moloch's ?"

"There used to be," nodded Jack.

"But, with all that going on—an orchestra and dancing—I don't understand how it could have happened ?"

M. Jack bent his head, and, instead of replying,

THE COURIER'S SECOND TALE ♣

sketched vaguely with his finger a complicated design upon the table. I insisted :

"With all those people there, the police could at least begin by making inquiries of those present when . . ."

"I was not there," said M. Jack hastily. He gave me a sudden suspicious glance, got up, and, with hands in his pockets, went over and leant against the counter, whence he fixed me with a sombre and unwavering stare.

"What's the matter ?" asked Maud idiotically.

I got up.

"The matter is," I said, "that it's time to beat it."

The various members of the party finished their drinks and moved towards the door. At the counter I settled the bill. M. Jack lifted the lamp to light us down the street. As he moved, the shadows that hung over the door at the back of the bar were suddenly dispelled and, faintly white against the inner darkness, I saw a man's face. Then I realised why the figure that had left the bar on our entering had seemed familiar. Jack was murmuring good-nights. On a sudden impulse I stopped and faced him squarely.

"What's the matter ?" he asked dully.

"Oh, nothing—in that way," I said. "It is not my business. It only occurred to me that in all this affair you were rather lucky—you and your friend. The police . . ."

M. Jack gave a low, evil laugh. He almost pushed me into the street and closing the door

JIM OF MOLOCH'S BAR

behind me, turned the key. In the moment of its closing I heard him say :

"The police ! Considering who we are—*my friend and I*——!"

"What very disagreeable people you seem to have known, Mr. Turpin," observed the Lady of Fashion. Her tone was a crisp reminder to the Courier that *hors d'œuvres* cannot all be bolted, for there are stones in olives.

"I twigged that feller Jim was a bad 'un," said Mr. Buck complacently. He was allowed to enjoy his detective triumph. Those few who realised the existence of a latter and more essential point to the Courier's tale were not sure enough to enlarge upon it.

"You have the French conception of the *conte*, Turpin," drawled Vivian Spencer. "But I suggest explanatory footnotes on the *combine* system. We are barbarous islanders and do not understand."

"Talkin' o' corpses," broke in the inexorable Mr. Buck, "I bring to mind a mix-up we 'ad in Roxminster once, when I was a young chap. Nasty business, it was, but a neat little bit of coincidence for all that, complete with best quality 'orrible details. None of your 'ole-an-corner froggishness. I'll tell it you, if you care to 'ear it?"

Mrs. Dane-Vereker raised a jewelled hand.

"Mr. Buck, I implore you to spare us. Not

THE COURIER'S SECOND TALE

another murder yet. Later in the day. I feel so sure of your forcible taste in crime that, honestly, I funk your story in this temperature. This evening? *Please, Mr. Buck?* ”

“Yours to command, I’m sure, ma’am,” replied the printer. “The affair in question was not precisely a murder, but—when Venus calls, Mars obeys!”

The implication was so comic that Mrs. Dane-Vereker hurt herself in preserving a proper gravity. Mr. Spencer, frankly “fed up with the old bounder,” did an exceptional thing and stepped into the breach.

“Who,” he asked, “will tell us a cheerful tale?”

“Mr. Herrick,” said the woman doctor, “will recite us a cheerful poem.”

The poet scowled with embarrassment.

“My poems are never cheerful,” he muttered gloomily.

The Courier gave a nervous laugh.

“Come, come!” he cried. “What lugubrious talk! I blame myself for selecting a sombre key, but I thought Miss Pogson——”

“Oh, I *did*, Mr. Turpin. And I’m much interested in the psychological implications of your tale. Perhaps, as Mrs. Dane-Vereker is so affected by tragedy, she will herself strike the lighter note?”

The Lady of Fashion, from under drooping lids, let her ironical eyes rest a moment on the aggressively upright figure of the Schoolmarm. Then she shrugged her pretty shoulders.

JIM OF MOLOCH'S BAR ♣

"Soit!" she said. "But the lightness may be a little disreputable. Also I should like a Benedictine."

Vivian Spencer rose instantly and gave the necessary instructions. While waiting for her liqueur Mrs. Dene-Vereker hummed a low tune and watched the bristle of masts and spars pattern the steep hillside beyond the estuary. The sun blazed down and, as the café emptied, the lazy swell of the harbour sea seemed to invade the quay and set the whole slumbrous scene rocking gently in the heat. The liqueur arrived.

"May we have the story?" asked Henry Scott.

"There is no title," pouted Mrs. Dane-Vereker.

"No matter," murmured Vivian Spencer.

"Is it not

THE LADY OF FASHION'S SECOND TALE ? "

"Am I a monkey in a freak show, Mr. Spencer?" smiled Mrs. Dane-Vereker. "I insist on a title. Any title. Let us call it

BREAD UPON THE WATERS

I WAS at school with Blanche Radnor and, as we shared a room for two years, I came to know her very intimately. The friendship was kept up, for the Radnors lived not far from us in Somerset, and, as it happened, when we moved to town we took a flat in the next street to their London house. Blanche's most marked characteristic as a young girl was a clumsy but lovable recklessness which, considering the possibilities, led her less often into serious trouble than might have been expected. But it wrecked her happiness in the end, and the story I had the idea of telling to you is a good moral lesson in so far as it shows (though with exceptional exaggeration) what cruel shaming may be the long-deferred punishment of careless extremism. If I venture to relate the incident in the presence of maidenhood it is because we are, after all, in France, and (the narrator's voice tightened, a little in anticipation of the coming thrust) because Miss Pogson, as a student of human nature in embryo, will draw from it conclusions of a strictly "psychological nature!" Also, my tale of yesterday was of chivalry; that of to-day shall be of the other thing, for even men of breeding are sometimes cads.

BREAD UPON THE WATERS •

As you can imagine, our leisure at school was devoted to successive crazes. One term we were athletic, another literary or theatrical, a third political, a fourth devoted to some trick of speech, clothing, or coiffure. There came a day when one of the older girls obtained from a sailor brother the enthusiasm and appliances for tattooing. I apologise for the anti-climax (smiled Mrs. Dane-Vereker, seeing a gleam of amusement on the faces of her listeners). I should have graduated via stamp-collecting or poker-work. It sounds absurd, but there it was. Tattooing became the chic of the moment among those who thought of present pleasure rather than subsequent appearances. I am afraid I shirked. It looked likely to hurt, and I fancied my skin a little in those days. Blanche Radnor, of course, was an eager competitor, and, most characteristically, determined to go a little further than any of the rest. While the majority contented themselves with a small initial or flower or decorative cipher on the shoulder or near the ankle, Blanche treated herself to a large five-point star high up on the front of her round, white thigh. She was very proud of the monstrosity, talked of it to all her friends, and would show it to me every night as we got ready for bed.

"You are an idiot, Blanche!" I said on one occasion. "In three years' time you'll give anything to be free of it."

"Oh, he won't mind!" she giggled.

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THE LADY OF FASHION'S SECOND TALE ●

After leaving school I went to Brussels for a year, and learnt the news of Blanche's engagement to Kenneth Murdoch as though I were an acquaintance and not an intimate—second-hand, that is to say, in a letter from a mutual friend. When I reached home again and saw Blanche, I pressed for the details due from a fiancée to a girl contemporary. The engagement had by then lasted six months, and, though I was prepared for a rapture more sedate than that of the first breathless days, I was not prepared to be met with embarrassed vagueness. I drew in my congratulatory horns and discreetly awaited enlightenment. To my amazement, I discovered that the girl was so infatuated that she could hardly talk of her lover, that his own scowling reticence had subdued her exuberant chatter to a kind of strangled whisper. Kenneth Murdoch did not appeal to me. He was an engineer, engrossed in his work, climbing steadily to wealth from the narrow groove of a good but impoverished family. He was forceful, certainly, and I found no difficulty in believing him professionally brilliant: but his harsh cynicism suggested self-will and, ultimately, cruelty. Blanche would follow him with adoring eyes as he moved about a room, would droop on his arm as they walked together. It was rather sad to see her shining vitality become the mirror of another's egoism. She was his slave, and the woman in me—although I fear my feminism was sadly backward in those days—rather resented this open flaunting of male domination.

It was not long before I learnt of the disapproval of Blanche's parents. They belonged to the backwoods squire-archy, were conventional and, under the amiable obtuseness of their manners, arrogant and exclusive. They disliked Murdoch's aggressiveness and distrusted his brilliance. One day Blanche came to me in consternation. Her father had declared that the engagement must continue for another two years, or he would withdraw the very provisional consent hitherto given. On the other hand, Murdoch had an important contract in Australia, was due to sail in three weeks, and had decided that he wished her to go with him. The poor girl wept over the conflicting choice. Murdoch had appropriated her will-power, but he could not breathe into her defiance of her parents. Also she was their child and inherited something of their stay-at-home complacency. She disliked the thought of Australia, and shrank from the sort of folk among whom her first year of marriage would be spent. For all her absorption in her lover, she was not blind to his background, and her simple vision of a comfortable life in London, where she could allot her husband's work hours to his friends, his leisure hours to hers, faded to blankness before the glare of this uncompromising dilemma. I could do nothing but attempt to comfort, and even that only half-heartedly, for it was useless to expect mercy from Murdoch, and I knew the Radnors well enough to realise how wearing and relentless would be the drip-drip of their obstinate hostility.

THE LADY OF FASHION'S SECOND TALE ♣

Eventually, as you will have guessed, the parents, using to the full the thousand tiny opportunities for influence and pressure that their position gave them, won the day. Blanche was so broken in spirit, and her love for Murdoch so abject, that she stooped to a dismissal by post. She wrote an abrupt but cringing note, to which he did not reply, and, until she received news of his actual sailing for Australia, spent her life in terror of meeting him as she walked country lanes or London streets.

There was a certain amount of ill-natured gossip among acquaintances, for the two had been noticeably inseparable, and Murdoch's look and manner curiously more possessive than is usual even in a fiancé. Personally, although I was glad that Blanche was free and welcomed her slow return to normal riotous cheerfulness, I always wondered in my heart whether Murdoch were not the sort of man to turn up again—and in an ugly mood—at the most inconvenient moment.

Eighteen months passed and Blanche was engaged again. This time her choice was a young Scotch laird, gay and wealthy, conventionally self-indulgent, but—not surprisingly—strict in his view of women and vindictive with the stupid ingenuity of Scotch self-righteousness. Blanche was not in the least dominated by him, and he took her teasing with the good nature laid down by custom for the period of an engagement, but now and again I could see he did not relish the pertness, fearful of slights to his tinpot feudal dignity.

BREAD UPON THE WATERS ●

The wedding took place and I was a bridesmaid. The couple went abroad for the honeymoon, promising to be back in their fine new London house for the autumn. A few days after their departure I found myself placed at a dinner-party next to Kenneth Murdoch. My surprise at his sudden appearance was increased by his affability. I had never known his touch so light. He had been to Australia and had triumphed; was now enjoying London doubly for his exile; chattered of theatres and country-house parties; told me of his plans for autumn shooting. I forgot my old antagonism and, warming to his easy geniality, began an unthinking conversation about former common friends. But I was not so bemused that it did not startle me a little when he asked :

"And Miss Radnor? How is she?"

"Oh, she's just married," I replied, assuming the eagerness of one who has unwittingly overlooked an important piece of news. And I enlarged on the details of Blanche's wedding and prospects.

"I shall look forward to seeing her again," he said, "and offering my congratulations. Perhaps a belated wedding present would be forgiven. I have been home so short a time."

And with quiet competence he glided off into further mutual reminiscences.

Several times in the summer that followed I came across him, each time accepting more joyfully the change in him, each time losing grip more completely on the forbidding Murdoch of

THE LADY OF FASHION'S SECOND TALE

my memory. When Blanche got home, I mentioned his name during one of our first intimate conversations. She was much interested to hear of him again and suggested I should bring him to tea. I did so, and there was neither embarrassment nor affectation of cordiality. The incident of the broken engagement was clearly at an end.

After the passing of two successful housewarmings, Blanche had the idea of a fancy-dress ball. Her husband encouraged the scheme, and there was much talk of costume and of Clarkson's and of how little one should dare to wear. We had motored out to lunch in Surrey, and were coming home in the smooth, keen sunlight of a November afternoon. The car was a large one, but full to discomfort of Blanche, her husband, myself, two girls—schoolmates of ours—and the brother of one of them. As we swept up Richmond Hill towards the park, we were all talking at once about the latest freak idea for a surprise tableau. Suddenly Blanche screamed above the din,

"There's Kenneth! He must come! Stop! Stop!" and she banged on the glass behind the chauffeur's head.

As the car swerved to the curb, Kenneth Murdoch trotted his horse across the road and reined in by Blanche's side. The park gate was immediately in front of us, and the white road, after a few yards of rise, dipped out of sight behind the winter greyness of the grass.

"Kenneth, we are having a dance and you've

BREAD UPON THE WATERS

got to come. There's to be a water carnival and a snow scene and lots of things. What'll you wear ? ”

He thought a moment.

“ Really, I must have a moment's thought. A pierrot would be distinguished. No one else will dare. Like travelling third on Coronation Day. Carriages empty. What are you going as ? ”

Naturally we answered in chorus and he listened politely.

“ I've a better idea for you, Blanche,” he said at last. “ Something cool and cheap and utterly original. Go as that——” jerking his thumb over his shoulder at the building that stood behind him—“ Go as the *Star and Garter* ! ”

And he pulled his horse round and trotted down the hill to Richmond.

As though by collusion the car started once more on its way. Blanche sat staring in front of her, white and breathless. I and the two girls—all of us in the first hideous gasp of comprehension—swung helpless over a pit of embarrassment. The brother, glancing curiously at all of us, lit a cigarette and studied the view. With a great effort I forced some fatuous change of subject. As I did so, I noticed the face of Blanche's husband : it was set in lines of cruel fury, and his red ears worked horribly with the twitching of his scalp. Characteristically, he took no steps, then or afterwards, to thrash Murdoch or to call him out. He merely devoted his very considerable energies to making Blanche's life the hell that it became.

THE LADY OF FASHION'S SECOND TALE

Whatever the feelings of the audience (and it may be surmised that those of the younger males were appreciative, of Dr. Pennock contemptuous, of Miss Pogson mixed, and of the Priest and Master-Printer suitable enough to their respective cloths), they found no opportunity of expression owing to an unexpected interruption. As the Lady of Fashion, with elaborate indifference, was turning from story-telling to smoke rings once again, a shabby individual sidled towards the Courier and whispered in his ear. Mr. Turpin consulted his watch and jumped to his feet.

"Mrs. Dane-Vereker will acquit me of discourtesy. I am bound to hurry off on urgent private business. Let me beg you not to allow my absence to disturb your pleasure. If we meet at the hotel at 6 o'clock it will be my privilege to suggest a good restaurant for dinner. Ladies and gentlemen, au revoir!"

There was a lack of flourish in his gesture as he turned and almost scampered away.

"Something wrong," said Peter Brown.

"Not bad news, I hope," was Father Anthony's anxiety.

"For my part," announced Dr. Pennock, "I am going for a walk."

"My dear lady! In this heat?"

The woman doctor smiled grimly at the frailty of the Foreign Office.

"All weathers, Mr. Spencer," she sighed, with that hint of priggishness from which so few professional women are free. Trim, athletic,

BREAD UPON THE WATERS ♣

magnificently English, she passed along the glaring quay and out of sight behind the old, parti-coloured houses near the Douane sheds.

The silence that followed Dr. Pennock's departure lengthened dangerously. A limp drowsiness crept over the diminished band of tourists. Miss Pogson sat up with a jerk.

"I declare I shall drop off in a moment!" she giggled. "And I have three afternoon lessons a week in term."

"Insidious influence of degenerate Latin manners, Miss Pogson," said Peter Brown genially.

"Somebody must undoubtedly keep us awake. I cannot guarantee my hat or my hair during slumber on this very eccentric bench." Mrs. Dane-Vereker's tone was superficially jocular, but a note of fundamental anxiety caught the Schoolmarm's keen and not too charitable ear.

"From what he has said," she remarked at large, "Mr. Buck has a tale to set our hair on end."

The Lady of Fashion laughed pleasantly. Her amusement was partially due to the elaborate indifference of Miss Pogson's manner, which addressed the quay, the harbour, and half France, excluding only the immediate company. At the same time, however, she recognised the touch and saluted it.

"Good, Miss Pogson!" she said. "But I fear it will be no improvement in my case."

Mr. Buck cleared his throat juicily.

"Nasty business!" he muttered with relish.

THE LADY OF FASHION'S SECOND TALE ♣

"But full 'er ginger. Also a beautiful case of coincidence; as nice a case as I ever heard."

"Coincidence is the chastening humour of God. But pray proceed, Mr. Buck," urged Father Anthony.

"Please, Mr. Buck," urged Miss Pogson.

"Fire ahead!" urged Peter Brown.

The Master-Printer glanced inquiringly at the Lady of Fashion. She inclined her head graciously.

"I withdraw my protest," she said sweetly.

"The line now bein' clear," began Mr. Buck with pomposity, "I will begin what must by rights be designated as

THE MASTER-PRINTER'S SECOND TALE,

but which is, put simply, just

THE HISTORY OF ANDREW NIGGS

WITH all respect due to Father Anthony, I haven't much opinion of God as a practical joker.

About the time I started in partnership, one of the most successful business men in Roxminster was a little humpbacked fellow with a wry neck, Andrew Niggs by name. He was a coal merchant, and had got his hump and screw neck heaving hundredweight sacks before he was fourteen. A regular tartar his father was, and no mistake. "He'd have no gentleman in his family," he used to say, and so poor Andrew had to sweat for it as soon as ever he could leave school. He cursed his father then, and cursed him all his life for that hump of his ; but I don't really see why he need have. It was those early years that taught him the value of money, and how to make it ; and though his friends used to chip him for his rum shape, the women didn't.

How it is these deformed fellows can get round nine women out of ten, I never could make out. Andrew could, anyway, and when I was a nipper he was a byword among the careful

THE MASTER-PRINTER'S SECOND TALE ♣

mothers in the town. He was an odd-humoured chap, going quiet for months at a time, and then he'd have a flare-up, and for a week or so he'd be fighting drunk. He'd a nasty tongue at the best of times, but if you got across him in the drink, it was an education, I can tell you.

I got to know him a bit, because he lent me money to start business, and, generally speaking, treated me very decently. I believe he rather liked me.

About this time Andrew married a strapping young girl out of our big draper's shop and became quite the domestic man. He doted on his wife, built her a fine new house, bought her a horse and anything she had a fancy to, and spent all his evenings at home.

It all went along very nicely for a few years, but then rumours began to get about coupling the name of Mrs. Niggs with a certain young fellow in the hardware line. Well, the next I heard was that Andrew had had one of his flare-ups and had come home in the small hours in a cab screaming blasphemies and shocking accusations against his wife. A week or two later I got a note from him, marked urgent and strictly private, asking me to come round to his office after hours that night. I went. There I found the ugly little chap looking like Satan, horribly upset about something or other.

"Good evening, sir," says I.

"My wife's played the whore," he rapped out, "and, by God, I'll make it her work too! She's gone off with that——" (it was something terrible

THE HISTORY OF ANDREW NIGGS ♣

to hear) " Charlie Beaver, and that's all you need know about it, save this: Beaver doesn't know who's behind his loans and mortgages, and you'll see him smashed before Christmas. Then he'll chuck her and she'll go to hell by the only way open to her. Why am I telling you this? Because I leave Roxminster to-morrow, for good. I won't stay here to be a laughing-stock. Everything is to be sold up. I've arranged with the lawyers about the child " (five years old, or thereabouts, he was—a fine little chap). " He'll be away in a home for three years, and then come back to Roxminster for his schooling. There's a lump sum fixed up in their hands for his education, and he has a new name from to-day. He's mine, before God—but one half mine—and he'll never see and know me after to-night. Nobody will know where I've gone, no more than what's become of him—except the lawyers and you. What you've got to do is to see that his mother never finds him out. If she does, let me know. It'll be a short acquaintance. And, further, write to me, care of my lawyers, once a quarter how the boy gets on. When he grows up, if he gets into bad company, you'll be sure to meet him—anyway, you hear more of the gossip in this town than anyone I know. Keep me primed, d'ye see? It's not that I think you trustworthy; I believe that of no one, but I know how to hold you. That loan stands without interest so long as you hold your tongue, and, what's more, the lawyers have instructions to pay you a fiver for each quarter's letter. So hold your tongue or,

THE MASTER-PRINTER'S SECOND TALE

by God, I'll smash you too! I'm going to the devil. Good-night."

And with that he slams the door on me.

Next morning the news was all over the town, and the following week the auctioneer's posters were up at Niggs's office and fine new house. They must have been the first things his wife saw as she drove from the station with Charlie Beaver.

Andrew was right. How he managed it I don't know, but they had quarrelled and parted before Christmas, and Charlie was sold up early in January. He left the town, and I've never heard word of him since.

Andrew was right, too, about his wife's career. She was on the streets not so very long after Charlie had turned her off. I was always careful not to speak to her, being sweet on my fiver each quarter, and once, when she made as if to address me, I signalled to a Bobby, and she spent the night in the jug.

Well, I kept my part of the bargain, writing regularly, and each quarter-day getting my cheque. I never knew where Niggs was, though, and never heard a word from him.

Meanwhile the boy "John Parsons," whose parents "had been lost on the *Michigan*," grew into a big, noisy lad with a turn for doctoring. He did well at school, and went straight from there as a student to our local hospital, where I often used to visit him. He'd been there the best part of two years, when one night I was called up about twelve by a little slut of a girl beating on my door like mad.

THE HISTORY OF ANDREW NIGGS ♣

"There's a man at our 'ouse," says she, "and he's mortal bad, ravin' 'orrid, and he says he wants you. 'Tell 'im it's Andrew with the 'ump as wants 'im,' he keeps 'ollerin."

"I'll come," I says, and was dressed in a jiffy. The kid took me away down into the filthy slum behind the gas-works. I could hear the racket long before we turned into a shoddy-looking house with "Beds 2d." in the window. I went up to the top of the house, guided by the howls, and there I saw a labourer of sorts wrestling with a dreadful-looking scarecrow who was trying to throw himself out of the window.

It was Andrew Niggs all right, though his hump was about the only thing to recognise him by. He was horribly wasted and his ugly face was twisted with D.T. He calmed down a bit when he saw me, but he was beyond talking sense, and I couldn't learn what had brought him to Roxminster. I spent the night lying on his legs to keep him in bed. The only thing he said to me was—"It's Hell for me, right enough, Buck," and then went off into his delirium.

He seemed to think it was Judgment Day, and he was up before the Almighty Beak.

"You needn't speak," he kept on over and over again, "You there on Your giddy throne; I wouldn't live in Heaven with You for the asking. You who gave me that father, who took my mother away before I knew her, bent and twisted me, and fooled me with that woman, the only safeguard against the thirst and lust You planted in me. No, I'll go to Hell, and for all eternity curse

THE MASTER-PRINTER'S SECOND TALE

You from my grill for the——” Well, ladies being present, you may guess the rest.

He seemed to be trying to tell me something which he had meant to do before he was taken bad, but he couldn't get it out before, as it seemed, his anxiety to get to Hell fuddled him. “Decent burial,” he said, or something like it, and then before I could say, “Cheer up, it's not as bad as that,” he'd be off on his Judgment Day caper again.

First thing in the morning I went round to the hospital and asked young John if he could arrange for admitting a bad case of D.T.

“Rather,” he cried. “Haven't had a case since I've been here. It'll be damned useful for my next exam.”

So I gave him the address and went off to the office. I didn't do much work that day, you may guess. I kept wondering what had brought Niggs to Roxminster, and whether I ought to tell young John about his father. It might be a kindness to the old man, but then maybe he was past any sort of sense, and I couldn't see as how it could be a kindness to the youngster. Besides, there was Andrew's express command about holding my tongue, not to mention the chance of a last “fiver” before the lawyers found out what had happened to Andrew—if he died—but then again he mightn't. So I decided to keep mum.

In the evening I went round to ask after the “case.” I found young John in the common-room.

“How's the patient?” I asked.

THE HISTORY OF ANDREW NIGGS

"Oh, 24," says he. "Priceless case ; perfect example of " . . . then he went off into medico's gibberish—it sounded bad enough.

"Will he recover ? "

"Not he."

"Liar ! " shouted another student. "He's in my ward, and old Thompy's giving him special attention with a nurse to himself."

"Bet you a fiver he's dead as a nail by this time to-morrow," cries John.

"Done," and they shook hands.

John took me out by the students' private entrance, and as I stood at the door to bid him good-night, I remember I saw a long sort of van drive into the yard there at the back. It was dark and I couldn't see clearly, but it looked like an ambulance of sorts.

"What's that ? " I asked. "Another interesting case ? "

John laughed. "That one will give no trouble," said he. "It's a pauper corpse for the dissecting-room, and I'm to have the head."

"Good-night," says I. "I'll look in to-morrow."

I left him whistling as he watched the body hoisted out. Mind you, he was a very decent chap really ; only a medical training doesn't make for sentimentality.

Next day I went round in the afternoon. "Mr. Parsons was in the dissecting theatre." I found the room, guided by the sound of laughter. They were laughing in there so loud that they did not hear me knock ; so I opened the door and went

THE MASTER-PRINTER'S SECOND TALE ♣

in. There was a crowd of young, white-coated gentry grouped round a table in the middle of the room. There was a corpse on the table. John was in the centre of the group, standing by the head. He was obviously causing the laughter, but I couldn't at the moment see how.

I pushed my way through to him and asked after the "patient."

"Won my bet all right," he said, and then went on with his game. He'd got hold of some exposed tendon in the neck of the corpse and was making her wink and grin at the company.

I didn't tell him who she was.

Vivian Spencer got up and strolled to the pavement. The very set of his shoulders expressed disgust. Peter Brown shuffled unhappily in his seat. Father Anthony, with a slight frown, gazed into vacancy. The Psychological Researcher smiled quietly to himself and lit a pipe. The silence became ridiculous. Mr. Buck, with a hoarse but embarrassed chuckle, bundled to his feet.

"Sorry if I've shocked you," he said aggressively. "My life has been spent among facts. And you asked for a little ginger . . ." He walked away, mumbling nervously to himself.

When he disappeared, the remainder of the party left their seats and congregated outside the café.

"I shall go back to the hotel, I think," said

THE HISTORY OF ANDREW NIGGS

Mrs. Dane-Vereker. Her elegant indifference was the most bitter possible commentary on the Master-Printer's story. Confronted with an unasked-for glimpse of a world she did not recognise to exist, she drew her skirts a little to one side and ostentatiously turned away. Miss Pogson, in whose clumsy and crude and simple heart was a strain of sympathy for humanity as humanity, looked after her with something like hatred. "Poor Mr. Buck," she thought. "And that empty-headed doll turns up her powdered nose, because he has shocked her hypocritical refinement!" Nevertheless, what really annoyed Miss Pogson was the refusal of the Lady of Fashion even to demonstrate so mildly as to turn up her nose.

Full of rancour, the Schoolmarm refused to accompany the others back to the hotel. Turning in the direction taken by Mr. Buck, she rashly set out to find him and to administer the balm of womanly sympathy.

By the time the hotel was reached, the good breeding of Mrs. Dane-Vereker and of Vivian Spencer had recovered its sense of proportion. Peter Brown urged reconciliation with Mr. Buck.

"You've scared the poor old thing horribly," he told Spencer. "Try and swallow the Oxford manner and be nice to him."

Henry Scott deprecated extremism.

"After all," he said, "the tale was nicely put together. And I liked the final subordination of matter to science."

THE MASTER-PRINTER'S SECOND TALE

Father Anthony was pacific on grounds of public interest.

"We cannot have strained relations between members of our own party," he urged. "I am sure Mr. Buck meant no discourtesy. Have I your permission to seek him out and to make the peace?"

"Thank you, Father Anthony," said the Lady of Fashion. "I'm never comfortable on a high horse, and shall be grateful to you for helping me down. He took me unawares. And it was rather grubby, wasn't it?"

INTERLUDE

I

THE Courier hurried through mean streets after his unpleasing guide. "Baron Slessheim requires your immediate presence," were the words which that disquieting messenger had murmured in his ear. "Slessheim! What next? And what the devil is *he* up to here?" thought Turpin. And he urged his short legs to more violent exertion.

At the door of a gaunt and peeling wall in a street of gaunt and peeling walls the guide stopped.

"The Baron is here," he whispered. "Please to enter."

Opening the door he stood aside and Turpin stepped cautiously forward into darkness. Hardly had he crossed the threshold, when the light from the street behind him faded and died. The door clanged to. Turpin listened intently, while, as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he contrived partially to take in the general nature of his whereabouts. He was in a machine shed. High above him small windows, their panes grimed and dusty, let a dim light flutter about the cobwebbed rafters of the roof. He

INTERLUDE ●

could make out great wheels, standing in ironical idleness ; darker streaks on the gloom were the driving-belts. There was no sound ; only a faint drip-drip of water somewhere in the far darkness of the shed. For a moment the Courier shivered. He disliked the thought of a wheel-pit or of a subterranean tank in this abandoned place. But the next instant his ready intelligence took command of the situation.

"Theatrical as ever !" he thought contemptuously, and lit a cigarette.

Hardly had the match gone out when a pale-coloured object flapped to the ground at his feet. He bent down. It was a sheet of cardboard, dusty and tattered, and on it in dimly-seen black letters :

DÉFENSE DE FUMER !

"Don't be a fool, Judas !" he said aloud. "I've no time to waste to gratify your sense of effect."

"It's not your *time* I want, my good—er, what is it, now ?——Turpin !" replied a voice ten feet above his head.

The Courier twisted his neck and made out the pale disc of a face, gummed to the darkness of the wall by which he stood.

"Oh, for God's sake, stop this fooling !" he cried angrily. "Are you coming down or am I coming up ?"

For answer there was a quick scraping of feet

INTERLUDE •

and the beat of a rope's end on the floor. Turpin saw a black mass slowly descending through the air.

"For a person of what I understand to be nowadays your figure, my friend, the ground floor is better," said the new-comer coolly, clapping his hands softly together to ease the friction caused by his rapid descent. "Let us sit."

He led the way, as though by instinct, through the rubbish and broken machinery that littered the floor. A plank set on two barrels apprised the Courier's shin of its readiness to receive him.

"Let me look at you!" said the mysterious host with the same mocking indifference. He switched an electric torch full in his visitor's face. Turpin blinked, but controlled his temper.

"H'm! nice and plump and prosperous, I see. Different story last time we met, eh? Well, to business. I have heard of your precious tour. Herodias sent me word from London. 'The Badger is on the make again,' she wrote, or words to that effect. And she kept me informed. So I thought a little chat would not be amiss. . . . I suppose there are some shekels among your collection?"

Turpin shrugged. He was now perfectly self-possessed.

"With an intelligence service like yours, dear Judas, amateur help is an impertinence. I suggest that you find out for yourself."

"None of that!" snapped the other. "I'm a fair man if treated on the straight. If not—remember Caracas!"

INTERLUDE ♣

Turpin was silent. The mention of Caracas gave him no comfort.

"Well, what is it you want?" he asked at last.

"At the moment, only this: You are to explain to your little lot that plans are altered. Instead of an immediate departure by train to wherever it was—Paris, I suppose?—the company will spend two or three days in an historic and beautiful château a few miles outside this town. You understand?"

"And the château?" queried Turpin.

"I'm coming to that. This evening, about half-past eight, you will take them in motor-cars to the Château de la Hourmerie, ten miles along the Paris road and two miles to the right. The cars will be at the hotel punctually; I will see to that. Everything will be in readiness to receive them at La Hourmerie, and, *if all goes well*, they will be most comfortable."

"But supposing they refuse to go?"

"My good friend, am I to teach you your alphabet?"

"I must have some explanation."

"Tell them that a nobleman, with whom you are intimate, has asked you, for reasons of a most delicate and romantic nature, to occupy his château for two nights at least. The English are sentimental snobs, and will gulp it down in their slushy eagerness for the disreputable. That's what they come abroad for. Tell them that the nobleman himself will appear to-morrow and make his explanation. Play on their hypocrite-craving for mystery and impropriety."

INTERLUDE ●

"If," said Turpin brutally, "you are cherishing the idea that *you* can pass *yourself* off as a nobleman on my clients, you will be greatly disappointed. I have told you before that you do not understand the English, and least of all the English upper classes. You will at best make an idiot of yourself; at worst land yourself in serious trouble."

"We are together in all things, *mon cher*," replied the other. His tone was smooth, but he plainly resented the Courier's contemptuous reference to his knowledge of Great Britain.

"You do not mean violence?" asked Turpin suddenly.

"Do I ever?" parried the "Baron" suavely.

Again Turpin was silent. He despised Slessheim (to use the current alias), but he also feared him. He recalled other occasions besides that at Caracas. There was the affair at Palermo, for example; and that grisly business in Djibouti.

"I'll do this much," he said, after a few seconds' very rapid thought. "I'll get them to this château and contrive to defer explanations until to-morrow afternoon. You must swear, however, that all shall be in order, that the comfort and ease of La Hourmerie shall be undisturbed until that time, that you will meet me early to-morrow morning somewhere between the town and the château, and that I get half of the gross—er—proceeds and 10 per cent. on the net remainder for my trouble. Do you agree?"

"I agree," said Slessheim simply.

Which point settled, they plunged into confidential discussion.

INTERLUDE

II

Three hours later the Courier reappeared at the hotel. He found his party in a group near the door and clearly in a state of considerable excitement. Father Anthony hurried forward.

"I am glad you have returned, Mr. Turpin. There has been a most unfortunate incident. Mrs. Dane-Vereker's jewel-case has been stolen from her bedroom. We——"

"Brazenly stolen!" interrupted the Lady of Fashion. "And from a locked room! I brought my key down here to the office. Despite that, the case has vanished. I should have thought at least, Mr. Turpin, that you could contrive to avoid hotels staffed by thieves!"

"It is an outrage! An outrage!" The proprietor danced to the front, waving a printed notice to the effect that only valuables deposited with him were within the responsibility of the establishment. "Madame has seen my *affiche*! It is on all the walls everywhere! And yet she talks of my house as a kettle of thieves! I will not——"

"Please, please!" begged the Courier. "Let us be calm. Of course"—he bowed to the Lady of Fashion—"I deplore most deeply that this should have taken place and in my absence. Equally, of course, I admit, if the mishap can in any way be connected with the arrangements of the tour, my full responsibility. If you will kindly give me all particulars . . ."

INTERLUDE 🐼

Mollified by this frank recognition of possible liabilities, Mrs. Dane-Vereker became her languid self once more.

"As a matter of fact, the actual loss is not *very* serious. The *idea* of theft upsets me, however, and I sometimes commit the fault of shrillness. A thousand apologies. The case is a small leather one and was in the pocket of my dressing-bag. It contained a few rings, a small pearl necklace, a pendant and some oddments. The whole lot are not worth more than a hundred pounds."

Turpin noted the details and drew the proprietor of the hotel (now just off the boil) into the privacy of the office. On emerging :

"I have arranged," he informed the Lady of Fashion, "that a day shall be given for investigation. By this time to-morrow we shall be able to adjust our perspective. I hope I have done what meets with your approval ?"

"By this time to-morrow . . ." murmured the Professor, who had wandered in unobserved. "So much is possible by then. So very much."

Turpin glanced a little nervously at the learned gentleman. An odd coincidence. He felt slightly shaken by the sequence of recent events. With an effort he pulled himself together.

"Are we all here ?" he asked loudly.

Mr. Buck, reconciled ; Miss Pogson, slightly soured by the happy ending to a promising quarrel ; Dr. Pennock, sweating but vigorous—rallied to the call. Henry Scott waved from one corner of the lounge. "Just coming !" he called. The

INTERLUDE

Poet, bowed over some manuscript in another corner, jerked his pencil absently in the air, but made no move. The others were already grouped with relaxed elegance round the Courier.

"I have," began Turpin oratorically, "to announce a slight change of plan. Or, rather, to submit to your decision a proposed change of plan." He dropped his voice. "I was called away this morning to see an old friend of mine, a French nobleman of ancient descent. A true son of the Gallic aristocracy, he has all the gallantry for which his race is famous. His adoration of the sex leads him into adventures of romantic absurdity. I remember once—but no matter. Enough that I have helped him on earlier occasions (and I admit it alike with shame and pride) to the sweetnesses of love. He now calls not only upon me, but also upon you, to help him in circumstances of delicacy and urgency."

Miss Pogson breathed heavily. She had little doubt whither all this was tending. Of course the nobleman had cast an approving eye upon her as she visited the historic sights that very morning. The plaid skirt was undoubtedly neat. Too much to say that she had actually *expected* it to achieve some such result as this, but at any rate she was not really surprised. Women were proverbial slaves to a uniform. Why not men—conversely—to a touch of group-personality in a woman's dress. So had she argued when purchasing the now triumphant garment. This duke—she hoped he was a duke—had opened his campaign with a flourish. She must feign elusive-

INTERLUDE

ness. She must be no easy prey. Raptures delayed are raptures doubly dear. That sounded like something said before. She lost herself among the ghosts of quotations thronging about her memories of Handbooks to Great Authors.

In the meantime the rest of the party, by silence or by vague noises of irritation, were urging the Courier to be more explicit. He proceeded :

"My friend has recently come into possession of an old property of his family's in the past—the famous and beautiful Château de la Hourmerie, some ten miles from this town. For reasons vital to the romance of the moment he has to absent himself for two nights from the château. For reasons equally vital it is essential that the château be occupied, and brilliantly, for those two nights. He has accordingly begged me to ask you whether you would consent to be his guests there until the day after to-morrow. Your comfort is assured. The house is both lovely and of deep historic interest. What do you say ? "

"Any ghosts ? " asked Henry Scott.

The Courier beamed non-committally.

"Any—er—papyri ? " added the Professor.

"The library," replied the Courier, "is famous for its collection of early manuscripts, but whether specimens are among them of the kind you indicate, Professor, I am too ignorant to say."

"I think," remarked Dr. Pennock, "that we are entitled to some explanation, and to an assurance that our consent will help not only your friend, but the general moral health of the community."

INTERLUDE

"I was going to ask," put in Father Anthony, "whether by agreeing we should become accomplices in any—er—er—whether agreement would be equivalent to connivance at—er—"

"My dear Dr. Pennock! My dear Father Anthony! I know and respect your scruples. My friend is the soul of honour, and I am sorry that you should think *me* capable of wishing to involve you in any affair of which you would not approve." The Courier found weight of emphasis a happy cloak for meagre argument. "Although I am sealed to secrecy, I give you every assurance that your help will be towards an excellent end, and that by this time to-morrow you will know all and realise why I am compelled to ask you to make this leap in the dark."

"By this time to-morrow. . . ." The buzz of the Professor's voice was lost in the general exchange of ejaculations and amused surprise.

"It's a sporting idea, anyway," said Peter Brown.

"I think it's *beautiful*!" sighed Miss Pogson, ecstatically.

"Ah—the petticoats! God bless 'em!" chuckled Mr. Buck.

"I seem to recall an interesting case connected with a château of the name or of a name very similar. I should like to go." The Psychological Researcher was decisive.

"I've had enough of hotels for a bit," said the Lady of Fashion tartly.

"On my own behalf and on that of my friend, I thank you most heartily," flourished Turpin.

INTERLUDE

"Cars will be ready at eight-thirty. Let us dine before we go. If you will lead on to the large café opposite the Palais de Justice, I will see to the luggage, and follow."

"'Temperamental' is the right word for this tour!" said the Bureaucrat to the Lady of Fashion as they crossed the Grande Place. "I wonder what the idea is? All that rot about a romantic nobleman!"

She looked at him shrewdly.

"And all that rot about a stolen jewel-case" she added.

III

The Château de la Hourmerie lay in a deep hollow beyond the little village to which it had given a name. The house was in part mediæval, but had been enlarged and altered in the seventeenth and again halfway through the nineteenth century. Its ornate bulk squatted under the northern hill, and gardens of fantastic splendour stretched from the broad terrace, across the level bottom of the valley and up the opposing slope. After years of neglect, the place had been purchased two years before the date of Turpin's Tour by a small, rat-like lawyer from Paris, acting on behalf—so it was rumoured—of a Venezuelan millionaire. Money was poured out on repairs. Gaiety and lavish entertaining marked the new régime. The peasants of the neighbourhood knew enough to recognise that the guests, whatever their nationalities, were not French and were polyglot.

INTERLUDE

The proprietor, Count Alfonso de la Cuerva, commonly known as "Count Alphonse," came seldom to his château, or was seldom seen there. The château was staffed by South American half-breeds, secretive and unapproachable.

With a recent record of this kind, it was natural that the passing of the three motor-cars at nine o'clock at night through the simple village street should elicit no curiosity from the inhabitants. It was a warm evening, and a full moon hung suavely above grass and trees.

"How lovely it is!" cried Mrs. Dane-Vereker, as the cars swept through the avenue to the great door of the house. The white walls glistened in the moonlight. Sudden shadows, like shreds of velvet, strewed the silver lawns.

Henry Scott sniffed the air like a dog.

"Smell any spooks, Scott?" asked Peter.

"It seems promising," replied the expert cautiously.

The cars were unloaded. Silent servants carried the suit-cases upstairs.

"It's too warm to think of bed," said the Bureaucrat.

"Coffee on the terrace would be pleasant?" inquired Turpin.

"Oh, yes!"

"And whisky!"

"And cigars!"

The Courier departed smiling. In a few moments he returned. "If you will see your rooms and then come down again, chairs and refreshments will be ready on the main terrace."

INTERLUDE ●

"If you will excuse me, Mr. Turpin," said Miss Pogson, "I will go to bed. I am tired with sight-seeing and the excitements of the day. Good-night."

As she climbed the huge staircase, she congratulated herself on the ruse which set her free to be alone and to anticipate in imagination the splendours of her future. Already she saw herself as mistress of this fairy palace.

The others gathered on the flagged terrace outside the tall windows of the *salon*. Comfortable basket chairs were occupied. Syphons fizzed; matches spurted and went up in smoke. The soft air stroked the tired travellers with its iridescent fingers.

"Why not more stories?" asked the Courier. "I understand several are due. We who have done *our* duty, feel others should do theirs!"

And he laughed smoothly at the faint cheeriness he did not feel.

"Mr. Scott!" commanded Mrs. Dane-Vereker.

"Ma'am!" mimicked the Psychical Researcher.

"We throw you the handkerchief. You are so evidently the man for the moment."

"Without pretence of reluctance, ma'am," he replied, "I pick it up."

And on the broad terrace, under the stealthy caress of an enigmatic moon, he began

THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S SECOND TALE.

THE TOOL

I SHALL call my story "The Tool" for the excellent reason that the poor fellow who told it me himself used that pitiful phrase. My interests take me into strange places, as do Dr. Pennock's lawful occasions. The mind is my hobby, particularly in its more abnormal states, and I have found opportunities of study alike where abnormalities are recognised as abnormalities, and where they masquerade as mere eccentricity. It was in one of the former localities that I heard this story, and I shall recall so far as possible the narrator's own words, because they will in some sort hand on the impression I received, and, I hope, set you marvelling a little at one whom the community has labelled—and no doubt rightly labelled—a lunatic. Let, therefore, the lunatic speak. We had exchanged a few trivialities as to the garden of the asylum in which we sat, and I had made some mention of the building itself. He commented on the general plan of the house, and described his daily life with simple contentment.

I like the long south corridor, he said, with its light-coloured walls and low windows looking on to the garden. I do my writing there, for it is

THE TOOL

very quiet, especially when Jellerby is off colour and is obliged to keep to his room. He calls himself a Social Democrat, and is eloquent on the rights of man—a wonderfully fluent speaker with facts and figures at his finger-tips to drive home every argument. But one tires of that sort of thing very easily. Of the two, I would rather listen to Charlie Lovel recite his endless pedigree as he sits dribbling over his knitting.

I cannot help smiling to myself when I think of yesterday's sermon. Canon Eldred was the preacher, and was obviously ill at ease, as indeed I should have been in similar circumstances. He has a red, cheerful face with comfortable folds of flesh about the chin, a typical, healthy-minded Philistine, whom it did one good to see. However, he was there to speak to us. He took as his theme the Duty of Cheerfulness. The subject was excellent and what he said was to the point; but I could not help wondering whether he had the slightest idea of the condition of those whom he addressed. Evidently he realised our need, but there was a tendency to regard us less as men than as children. He spoke incautiously of the man in the street, and in so doing showed the falsity of his position. We have no use for arguments calculated to satisfy the ordinary man, since we are extraordinary men in an extraordinary position.

No, "the man in the street" was, to say the least of it, a most unhappy phrase.

I should like to tell Canon Eldred my own story. Perhaps, if I tell it to you, you may meet him, and in that way he will hear it, if only second-

THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S SECOND TALE •

hand. He told us that next week he was going away to enjoy a well-earned holiday. Two years from now I was taking my summer holiday too.

Autumn holiday it was, in fact, for our vicar—I was senior curate at the time in a big working-class parish in the north of England—had gone off to the sea with his children in July, and Legge, my junior, had claimed August for the Tyrol.

I had made no definite plans for myself that year. Something I felt sure would turn up, and if all my friends were booked elsewhere, I knew that I could depend on ten days' shooting at my uncle's place in Devonshire, or a fortnight of fresh air and plain living on Bob's disreputable old ketch. But somehow everything fell through. My uncle, who was beginning to be worried about death-duties, had let the shooting for the first time in fifty years; Bob was busy running his craft aground on Danish shoals, and I was left to my own resources. I set off finally at twelve hours' notice on a ten-days' walking tour, determined to hunt out some weather-proof barn, within easy distance of a river or the sea, where Legge and I could take our boys to camp at Easter.

I left on a Monday (and I would have Canon Eldred, if he ever reads this, to note the date, because the dates are an important part of my narrative), and Legge came with me to the station, for I had several matters to arrange with him connected with the parish work. I took a ten-days' ticket. It was stamped September 22nd, and, as I said before, the 22nd was a Monday.

That night I slept at Dunsley. It was the

THE TOOL

end of the season—nearly all the visitors had left the place—but the harbour was jammed with the herring fleet, storm-bound for over three days, and all the alley-ways in the old town were crowded with fishermen. On the Tuesday I started off with my rucksack, intending to follow the line of the cliff, but the easterly gale was too much for me and I struck inland on to the moors. I walked the whole of the day, a good thirty-five miles, and towards dusk got a lift in a farmer's cart. He was going to Chedsholme, and there I spent the night at the Ship Inn, a stone's throw from the Abbey Church. I felt disinclined for a long tramp on Wednesday, so I walked on into Rapmoor in the morning, left my things with old Mr. Robinson at the Crown, borrowed a rod and tackle from him, and spent the afternoon fishing the Lansdale Beck. I found a splendid camping-ground, but no barn or buildings, and saw the farmer, a churchwarden, who readily gave permission for the setting up of our tents if ever we brought our boys that way. Wednesday night I spent at Rapmoor, Thursday at Frankstone Edge, where I dined with the vicar, a college friend of Legge's, and Friday at Gorton. The landlady of the inn at Gorton kept a green parrot in a cage in the parlour. It was remarkably tame, and though I am not usually fond of such birds, I remember spending quite a long time talking to it in the evening.

I set out on the morning of Saturday prepared for a long walk and a probable soaking. Not that the rain was falling, but there was a mist sweeping

THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S SECOND TALE ●

inland over the moors from the sea which I was obliged to face, since my track lay eastwards. I followed up the road to the end of the dale, and then took a rough path that skirted a plantation of firs, past a disused quarry, on to the moor. By noon I was right on top of the table-land. I ate my sandwiches in the shelter of a peat shooting-butt, while I tried to find my exact position on the map. It was not altogether easy, but I made a rough approximation, and then looked to see which was the nearest village where I could find lodging for the night. Chedsholme, where I had slept on Tuesday, seemed to be the easiest of access, and though they had charged me just double of what was reasonable for supper, bed, and breakfast, the fare was good and the house quiet, no small consideration on a Saturday night.

It was after two when I left the shelter of the butt. I had at first some difficulty in finding my way. There were no landmarks on the moor to guide me, the flat expanse was only broken by mound after mound of unclothed shale running in parallel lines from north to south, which marked the places where men had searched for iron-stone many years before. Gradually the mounds grew less and less frequent, and I was beginning to think that I had left them all behind, when one larger than the rest suddenly loomed up out of the mist.

Every man has experienced at some period in his life that strange intuition of danger which compels us, if only it be strong enough, to alter

THE TOOL ●

some course of action, substituting, for a reasonable motive, the blind force of fear.

I was walking straight towards the mound when I came to a standstill. Something seemed to repel me from the spot, while at the same time I became conscious of my intense isolation alone on the moor miles away from any fellow-creature. I stopped for half a minute, half in doubt as to whether to proceed. Then I told myself that fear is always strongest when in pursuit, and, smiling at my folly, I went on.

At the further side of the mound was a dead man.

He was a foreigner, with dark skin and long, oily locks of hair. A scarlet handkerchief was tied loosely round his throat. There were earrings in his ears. He lay on his back with his eyes wide open and glazed.

My first feeling was one not of surprise or pity, but of intense, overpowering nausea. Then with an effort I pulled myself together and examined the body more closely. I could see at once that he had been dead several days. The hands were white and cold, and the limbs strangely limp. His clothes were little more than rags. The shirt was torn open, and tattooed on the chest—even in my horror I could not help but marvel at the skill with which the thing was done—was a great green parrot with wings outstretched.

At first I could see no sign of how the man had met his death. It was not until I turned the body over that I noticed an ugly wound at the back of the skull that might have been made by some blunt instrument or a stone. There was

THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S SECOND TALE ♣

nothing for me to do except report the matter to the police as quickly as possible. The nearest constable would be stationed at Chedsholme ten miles away, and I decided that the best way of getting there in the mist would be to walk eastwards until I struck the mineral line that runs from the Bleadale ironstone quarries. This I did, and I shall not easily forget the joyful feeling of companionship in a living world that I experienced on hearing the distant whistle of an engine, and five minutes later, on seeing through a break in the clouds, the long train of trucks crawling along the sky-line.

Once on the permanent way my progress became less slow. Freed from the necessity of maintaining a sense of direction, I began to think more of my horrible discovery. Who could the man be, and why had he been killed? He seemed to have nothing in common with this wild, cold country, a mariner whom one might have seen without surprise, in the days of the Spanish Main, marooned with empty treasure chests on some spit of dazzling, shadeless sand. And then the man being killed, why had the murderer done nothing to hide the traces of his crime? What could have been easier than to have covered the body with the loose shale from the mound? "I could have done the thing in five minutes," I said to myself, "if only I had had a trowel"; but it was useless for me to wonder what might be the meaning of this illustration to a story I could never hope to read. I left the line at the point where it crossed the road, and then followed the latter down the ridge

THE TOOL ♣

to Chedsholme. I must have been a mile or more from the village when the silence of the late afternoon was suddenly broken by the tolling of a bell.

I remember once, on Bob's ketch, being overtaken by a sea fog; the current was running strong and Bob was a stranger to the coast. "It's all right. We shall worry through!" he said, and had hardly finished speaking when we heard the wild, mad clanging of the bell buoy. I did not soon forget the look of utter surprise on Bob's face. "There's some mistake," he said, with all his old lack of logic. "It's no earthly business to be there."

That was how I felt on that September evening two years ago. What right had the church bell to be ringing? There would be no evening service on Saturday in a place the size of Chedsholme. It was too late in the day for a funeral. And yet what else could it be? For as I passed down the village street I noticed that the windows of the shops were shuttered. There were men, too, hanging about the green dressed in their Sunday black.

I found the police-station without difficulty, or rather the cottage where the constable lived. He was away—so his wife told me—but would be back in the morning, and as there seemed to be no way of communicating with the authorities, I was obliged for the time being to keep my secret to myself.

The door of the Ship Inn was shut, and I had to knock twice before the landlady appeared.

THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S SECOND TALE

She recognised me at once. "Yes," she said, "we can put you up, to be sure. You can have the same room as before, No. 3, to the right at the top of the stair. The girl's out, so I'm afraid I can only give you a cold supper."

Ten minutes later I was standing before a cheerful fire in the parlour while Mrs. Shaftoe spread the cloth, dealing out to me in the meantime the gossip of the week. There were few visitors now, the season was too late, but she expected to have a houseful in a fortnight's time, when Mr. Somerset from Steelborough was coming back with a party for another week's shooting. "It's a pity we only get people just in the spring and summer," she said. "A village like this is terrible poor, and every visitor makes a difference. I suppose they find it too lonely, but, bless my life, there's nothing to be afraid of on these moors. You could walk all day without meeting anybody; there's no one to harm you. Well, sir, there's your supper ready. If you want anything you've only got to touch the bell."

"How is it," I asked as I sat down, "that the place is so quiet to-night? I always thought that Saturday evenings were your busiest times."

"So they are," said Mrs. Shaftoe; "we do very little business on a Sunday. It's only a six-days' licence, you see. If you'll excuse me, sir, I think that's one of the children calling; I'm single-handed just at present, for the girl's away at church."

She left the room seeing nothing of the effect that her words had on me. "Sunday!" I

THE TOOL

thought. "What can she mean? Surely she must be mistaken!" Yet there in front of me was the calendar, Sunday the 28th. Less than an hour before, I had heard the church bell calling to evening prayer. The men whom I had seen lounging about the street were only the ordinary Sunday idlers.

Somewhere in the last week I must have missed a day.

But where? I pulled out my pocket diary. The space allotted to each day was filled with brief notes. "First," I said to myself, "let me make certain of a date from which to reckon." I was positive that I had started on my holiday on Monday the 22nd; for further confirmation there was the return half of my ticket stamped with the date. On Monday I slept at Dunsley. Tuesday at this same inn at Chedsholme, Wednesday at Rapmoor, Thursday at Frankstone Edge, and Friday at Gorton. Each day, as I looked back, seemed well filled; my recollection of each was clearly defined. And yet somewhere there was a gap of twenty-four hours about which I knew nothing!

I have always been absent-minded—ludicrously so, my friends might say; it is in fact a trait in my character that has on more than one occasion put me into an embarrassing situation, but here was something of a nature completely different. In vain I groped about in my memory in search for even the shadow of an explanation; the week came back to me as no sequence of indistinguishable grey days, but as the clearest of

THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S SECOND TALE ♣

well-ordered processions. But was it really Sunday? Could the whole thing be a hoax, explicable as the result of some absurd wager? In default of a better, the hypothesis was worth testing. I made a pretence of finishing the meal and, taking my hat from the stand, hurried out of the house. I walked in the direction of the church, but as I approached the building my heart sank within me. I passed half a dozen young fellows hanging about the churchyard gate waiting to walk back home with their girls. "It's been a dreary Sunday," I said, and one stopped in the act of lighting a cigarette to agree. I stood in the porch to listen. They were singing Bishop Kenn's evening hymn. Then came the thin, piping voice of the priest asking for defence against the perils and dangers of the night.

Under a feeling of almost unbearable depression I made my way back to the inn and its empty parlour.

"After all," I said to myself, "there is nothing that I can do. Other men before now have lost their memory. I should be thankful for regaining it so quickly, and that no harm has been done. No good, at any rate, can result from my pondering over the thing." But, in spite of my resolution, I found it impossible to control my thoughts. Again and again I found myself returning to the subject, fascinated by this sudden break in the past and the possibilities that sprung from it. Where had I been? What had I done?

I believe that it was the sight of an ordinary cottage hospital collecting-box standing on the

THE TOOL ♣

mantelpiece that suggested to me a new way of approaching the problem. I have always kept accurate accounts, jotting down the expenses of each day not in my diary, but in a separate pocket cash-book. This, I thought, might throw new light on the matter. I took it out and hastily turned over the pages. At first sight it told me nothing. There was the same list of villages and their inns, no new names appeared. Then I read it through again. This time I made a discovery. The amounts I had paid in bills for a night's lodging, for supper, bed, and breakfast, were much the same at all the inns with the exception of the Ship at Chedsholme. The bill there seemed to be just twice as much as what it should have been. I only remembered to have spent one night there, Tuesday. It might be that I had spent Wednesday night as well.

I rang the bell and ordered what I wanted for breakfast ; then, as Mrs. Shaftoe was leaving the room, I asked her when it was that I had slept at the inn.

" Tuesday and Wednesday," she said. " You left us on Thursday morning for Rapmoor. Good-night, sir ! I'll see that you are called at half-past seven."

So my supposition was right. The day had been lost at Chedsholme. I wished, as soon as she had gone, that I had asked the woman more. She might have told me something of what I had done. And yet how could I ask such questions, except in the most general terms, without arousing the suspicion that I was mad ? From her behaviour

THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S SECOND TALE ♣

it was evident that I had conducted myself in a normal fashion. Very likely I had been out all day walking, only to return to the inn at night dead tired. Why should I worry about this thing, so small compared to the tragedy that centred in my discovery of the afternoon ?

It was clear, however, that I should not find peace sitting by the fire in the parlour. The clock had struck half-past nine ; I took my candle from the sideboard and went upstairs to bed.

The room was much the same as other rooms in country inns, but there was a hanging book-shelf in the corner holding half a dozen books—Dr. Meiklejohn's *Sermons in Advent*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Yorkshire Anecdotes*, *The House by the Sea*, and two bound volumes, one of *The Boy's Own Paper*, and the other of some American magazine. The latter I took down, and turning over the pages, saw that the type was good, and that the stories were illustrated by some fine half-tone engravings. I got into bed and, placing the candle on the chair by my side, began to read. The story dealt with a young Methodist minister in a New England town. The girl he loved had promised herself in marriage to a sailor who had been washed ashore from a stranded brig bound for Baltimore from Smyrna. Maddened by the girl's love for the foreigner, he forged a letter arranging for a rendezvous on the sand-dunes, met his rival there, and shot him through the heart. There was nothing remarkable about the story ; I read it to the end unmoved. But on

THE TOOL

turning the last page over, I came across a full page illustration that held me fascinated.

It showed the scene on the dunes, the minister, in his suit of black, gazing down on the dead body of the Syrian sailor just as I had stood that afternoon, and underneath were the words taken from the letterpress of the story :

“What would he not have given to blot out the sight from his memory !”

I suppose that up to the time of which I am writing my life had been a very ordinary one, filled with ordinary week-day pleasures and cares, regulated by ordinary routine. Within the space of a few hours I had experienced two great emotional shocks: the sudden discovery of the body on the moor, and this inexplicable loss of memory. Each by itself had proved sufficiently disturbing, but I had at least looked upon them as unconnected. A mere chance had shown me that I might be mistaken. I had stood, as it were, on the watershed at the source of two rivers. I had assumed that they flowed into different oceans. The clouds lifted, and I saw that they joined each other to form a torrent of irresistible force that would inevitably overwhelm me.

The whole thing seemed impossible, but I had a sickening feeling that the impossible was true, that I was the instrument, the unwilling tool, in this ghastly tragedy.

It was useless to lie in bed. I got up and paced the room. Again and again I tried to shut in the horrible thought behind a high wall of argument

THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S SECOND TALE ♣

built so carefully that there seemed to be no loophole for its escape. My best efforts were of no avail. I was seized with an overmastering fear of myself and the deed I might have done. I could think of only one thing to do, to report the whole matter to the police, to inform them of my inability to account for my doings on the Wednesday, and to welcome every investigation. "Anything," I told myself, "is better than this intolerable uncertainty."

And yet it seemed a momentous step to take. Supposing that I had nothing to do with this man's death, but at the same time had been the last person seen with him, I might run the risk of being punished for another's crime. I owed something to the position I held, to my future career, and so at last, when dazed and weary, I lay down to wait for sleep, I did so with the firm determination that on the morrow I would retrace the path I had followed that afternoon. I might discover some fresh clue to the tragedy. I might find that the whole thing was but the fancy of an overwrought brain.

Slowly I became aware of a narrowing of the field of consciousness. A warm, soft mist surrounded me and enfolded me. I heard the church clock strike the hour, but was too weary to count the strokes. The bell seemed to be tolling, tolling ; every note grew fainter, and I fell asleep.

When I awoke it was nine o'clock. The sun was shining in through the window, and pulling up the blind I saw a sky of cloudless blue. Sleep had brought hope. I dressed quickly, laughing

THE TOOL •

at the night's fears. In certain moods nothing is so strong as the force of unexpected coincidence. I told myself that I had been in a morbidly sensitive mood on the preceding evening, and in the clear light of day I took up the bound volume which had been the source of so much uneasiness. Really there was nothing in the story of the Methodist minister and the sailor, and as to the illustration, I turned the last page over and found that the illustration did not exist. Evidently I had imagined the whole thing.

"Another lovely day!" said Mrs. Shaftoe, as she brought in the breakfast. "Will you be out walking again, sir? If you like I could put up some sandwiches for you." I thought the idea a good one, and telling her that I should not be back until four or five, set out soon after eleven.

For the first few miles I had no difficulty in retracing my steps, but after I crossed the mineral line there were no longer landmarks to guide me. More than once I asked myself why I went on. I could give no satisfactory reply. I think now it must have been the desire to be brought face to face with facts that impelled me. I had had enough of the unbridled fancies of the preceding evening, and longed to discover some clue to the mystery, however faint.

At last I found myself among the old ironstone workings. There were the long line of mounds thrown up like ramparts, and there was the one standing alone in advance of the rest beside which the body lay. Slowly I walked

THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S SECOND TALE ♣

towards it. It seemed smaller in the light of a cloudless noon than in Sunday's mists. What was I to find? With beating heart I scrambled up the slope of shale. I stood on the top and looked around. There was nothing, only the wide expanse of moor and sky.

My first thought was that I had mistaken the place. Eagerly I scanned the ground for foot-prints. I found them almost immediately. They corresponded exactly to my nailed walking-boots. Evidently the place was the same.

Then what had happened? There was but one explanation possible, that I had imagined the whole thing.

And, strange as it may seem, I accepted the explanation gladly, for it was the cold reality that I dreaded, linked as it had been with the awful idea that I had done the deed myself in a fit of unconscious frenzy, and in my thankfulness I knelt down on the heather and praised the God of blue sky and sunlight for having saved me from the terrors of the night.

With a mind at peace with itself I walked back across the moor. I determined to end my holiday on the morrow, to consult some nerve specialist, and if need be to go abroad for a month or two. I dined that night at the Ship Inn with a talkative old gentleman who succeeded in keeping me from thinking of my own affairs, and, feeling sure of sleep, went early to bed.

My story does not end there. I wish that it did, but, as Canon Eldred said in yesterday's sermon, it is often our duty to accept things as

THE TOOL 🐾

they are, not to waste the limited amount of energy that is given for the day's work in vain regret or morbid anticipation.

For as I was sitting at breakfast on the morrow I heard a man in the bar ask Mrs. Shaftoe for the morning's paper. She told him that the gentleman in the parlour was reading it, but that Tuesday's was in the kitchen.

"Tuesday's," I said to myself. "Monday's, she means. To-day is Tuesday," and I looked up at the calendar on the mantelpiece. The calendar said Wednesday. I looked at the newspaper, and saw on every page "Wednesday, October 1st." I got up from the table half dazed and walked into the bar. I suppose Mrs. Shaftoe must have seen that there was something wrong, for before I spoke she offered me a glass of brandy.

"I'm losing my memory," I said; "I think I can't be quite well. I can't remember anything I did yesterday."

"Why, bless you, sir!" she said, "you were out on the moors all day. I made you some sandwiches, and in the evening you were talking to the old gentleman who left this morning, on Free Trade and Protection."

"Then what did I do on Monday? I thought that was Monday."

"Oh, Monday!" said Mrs. Shaftoe. "You were out on the moors all that day too. Don't you recollect borrowing my trowel? There was something you wanted to bury, a green parrot I think you said it was. I remember because it seemed so strange. You came in quite late in

THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S SECOND TALE

the evening and looked regular knocked up, just the same as last week. It's my belief, sir, that you've been walking too far."

I asked for my account, and while she was making it out I went upstairs to my bedroom. I took down the bound volume from the shelf and turned to the story of the Methodist minister. The illustration at the end was certainly not there, but on a close inspection I found that a page was missing. For some reason it had been carefully removed. I turned to the index of illustrations, and saw that the picture with the words beneath that had so strangely affected me should have been found on the missing page.

I walked to the nearest station and took the train to Steelborough, where I told my story to an inspector of police, who evidently disbelieved it. But in the course of a day or two they made discoveries. The body of an unknown sailor, a foreigner, with curiously distinctive tattooings on the breast, was found in the place I described. For some time there was nothing to connect me with the crime. Then a gamekeeper came forward, who said that on Wednesday, the 23rd, he had seen two men, one of whom seemed to be a clergyman, the other a tramp, walking across the moor. He had called to them, but they had not stopped. I stood my trial. I was examined, of course, by alienists, and here I am. No, Canon Eldred, the world is a little more complicated than you think. I agree with you as to the necessity for cheerfulness, but I want better reasons than yours. These are mine—they may be only a

THE TOOL

poor lunatic's—but they are none the worse for that.

The world, I consider, is governed by God through a hierarchy of spirits. Little Charlie Lovel, by the way, says that he saw the archangel Gabriel yesterday evening as he was coming from the bathroom, and for all I know he may be right. It is governed by a hierarchy of spirits, some greater and more wise than others, and to each is given its appointed task. I suppose that for some reason which I may never know it was necessary for that sailor-man to die. It may have been necessary for his salvation that he should die in a certain way—that his soul at the last might be purged by sudden terror. I cannot say, for I was only the tool. The great and powerful (but not all-powerful) spirit did his work as far as concerned the sailor, and then with a workman's love for his tool he thought of me. It was not needful that I should remember what I had done—I had been lent by God as Job was lent to Satan—but, my work finished, this spirit, in his pity, took from me all memory of my deed. But as I said before, he was not omnipotent, and I suppose the longing of the brute in me to see again his handiwork guided me unconsciously to the bank of shale on the moor, though even then, at the last minute, I had felt something urging me not to go on. That and the chance reading of an idle magazine story had been my undoing, and when for the second time I lost my memory, and some power outside myself took control in order to cover up the traces before I revisited the

THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S SECOND TALE

scene, the issue of events had passed into other hands.

Sometimes I find myself wondering who that sailor was and what his life had been.

Henry Scott paused a moment. Then :

"That is all," he said.

Beyond a slight shiver the listeners neither stirred nor spoke. The moon was setting, and the black shadow of the château had crept perceptibly further toward the balustrade. Beyond the silver ghostliness of the lawn, the shrubs and trees crouched motionless. Their shadow-crevices became sinister. It was as though strange beasts, smeared with metallic sheen, were watching an opportunity to crawl a little nearer to the house, watching with a thousand coal-black eyes.

The spurt of a match broke the spell. It was Peter Brown, anxious for a pipe. The Courier rose quickly and, passing inside the long window of the *salon*, switched on the lights. Across the gravel shot five oblong bars of gold. They turned the surrounding air to velvet black, but their prosaic steadiness crushed the secret life from the darkness. The party felt themselves once again twentieth-century persons, lying in deck chairs on the terrace of a modernised house. The Master-Printer made a bad joke and blew his nose. More people laughed than would normally have been the case.

"Whose turn ?" asked Dr. Pennock.

THE TOOL

"Will you yourself . . . ?" inquired the Courier politely.

"Better not, I think," returned the Woman Doctor. "Mr. Scott and I are professionally too nearly competitors to make certain a proper contrast. I propose Father Anthony takes the stage."

The Priest coughed shyly.

"It will be another ballad," he said. "But at least a little topical. Mrs. Dane-Vereker's unfortunate loss this afternoon put me in mind of it and, though she may at present incline to dispute the moral, she will remember the Divine reference to 'one sinner that repenteth.' If the interpretation is a little askew, blame my poor competence to face this so sudden demand for

THE PRIEST'S SECOND TALE."

THE MASTER-THIEF

IT was upon the Christmas time,
When men sit by the fire,
And all the kine in the blest midnight
Kneel low down in the byre.

Now Mike O'Brien was the master-thief
That e'er robbed roof or roost,
But kind S. Nicholas loved him well
For the good prayer that he used.

For when he went to crack a crib
With cross or master-key,
This was the one word that he said :
" S. Nicholas, pray for me ! "

And when he came at morning home
With pullet, pig, or ass,
With silver plate or rings of gold :
" Have thanks, S. Nicholas ! "

It was upon the Christmas Eve,
When the snow was sharp and drear,
Young Mike went out to rob a roost
To make him Christmas cheer.

THE MASTER-THIEF

And first he stole the red, red cock,
And syne he stole the grey,
Till up the ban-dog cried in the yard :
“ Away, Michael, away ! ”

He fled away by the north wall
Under the snow and sleet,
But as he leapt, the drifted snow
Crackled beneath his feet.

He leapt away by the north wall
To the Five-Acre Field,
But as he sprang, behold the earth
Began to rive and yield.

The black water under the wall
Stood ten foot deep and three,
And all he cried as he went down
Was : “ S. Nicholas, pray for me ! ”

The bitter ice above his head
Three fingers thick did pass,
And all he cried before he died
Was : “ Help, S. Nicholas ! ”

The red and grey were under his arm
As the ice closed him in,
So Michael died on Christmas Eve,
Unshriven of his sin.

THE PRIEST'S SECOND TALE

Now when he came to Heaven's gate
It was both locked and barred,
There was no man looked out on him,
Nor asked him how he fared.

There was no man looked out on him
As he took his brace and bit—
He set his hand to the gate of Heaven
And began to burgle it.

Now as it wore to the small, small hour
He thrust his hand within,
But the bolt screamed with a rusty shriek,
For Michael's fingers waxed but weak
As he thought upon his sin.

O then up crew the red, red cock
Across the roofs of Heaven,
And waked S. Peter where he lay
Asleep with the Eleven.

(For the red cock is Peter's cock,
That crowed in Pilate's hall,
And ever upon the steeple sits
To warn us sinners all.)

Then good S. Peter rubbed his eyes
In feather-bed as he lay :
"What is it gars the bonny cock
To crow so long ere day ?"

THE MASTER-THIEF

O then cried out S. Nicholas
From the courtyard a-near :
“ Hist, Peter, hist !—it is only I
A-stabling my rein-deer.”

Now when Michael came to Heaven’s door
It was locked right privily,
But he took the master-key in hand
And garred the lock to flee.

Yet as he stepped the threshold o’er
His sin came back to mind,
The door slipped out of his faint hand
And clanged to behind.

O then up crew the grey, grey cock
Across the roofs of Heaven,
And waked our Lady where she lay
Among her handmaids seven.

(For the grey cock is Christ’s cock,
And blessed be that same
That crowed in the dish before King Herod
When the Wise Men came.)

“ Look forth, look forth, S. Maudleyn,
Braid up your tresses bright,
What gars the bonny cock to crow
So long before the light ? ”

THE PRIEST'S SECOND TALE ♣

Then up and spake S. Nicholas
Beside the chimney-rift :
" Hist, Lady, hist !—it is only I
Bringing thy Babe His gift."

Then loudly laughed the Babe of God,
All on His Mother's knee :
" Why, whatten sort of a gift is this
That thou hast brought to Me ? "

S. Nicholas took the lad in hand
And led him forth to Mary,
Said : " Mike O'Brien is the master-thief
From Belfast to Tipperary ;

" And sure I am that the Queen of Grace
Will hold the man forgiven
Who'll turn the skill that he learned in ill
To force the gates of Heaven."

" Charming, dear Father Anthony ! " laughed
the Lady of Fashion. " I feel quite differently
towards my culprit. How lovely to have met him,
scurrying through the hotel corridors, calling on
S. Nicholas ! "

" It would facilitate the task of the police if
all thieves were so vocally devout," remarked
Peter Brown.

" And detectives like your friend, Mr. Brown."
Peter smiled.

THE MASTER-THIEF ♣

"Tubby usually came on the scene too late to hear the incidental music. He had to reconstruct it from other indications. And that reminds me. There is an adventure of his connected with a theft, which would come suitably at this point, if you——?" He bowed in response to the murmured approval. "The theft was unusual. Not documents, nor diamonds, nor dollars—but a baby. Incidentally, the facts have not been published and I must crave your discretion. I will avoid real names, and call it 'The Affair of the Mulhaven Baby,' but in a *cause célèbre* of this kind and among such a distinguished audience there is bound to be someone——. You understand?"

"Perfectly, Peter." The Bureaucrat answered for the *beau monde*.

"To-night we are all diplomats," murmured the Poet unexpectedly. He looked so innocent that Spencer was uncertain whether the hit were intentional. He decided pointedly to ignore it, and spoke again hastily:

"And so, DETECTIVE'S FRIEND, proceed with your

SECOND TALE."

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

THOSE of you who were in town in the summer of 19— will remember the extraordinary rumours that were current for the proverbial nine days concerning the alleged abduction of the infant son and heir of Lord Mulhaven. You will remember also how at the end of that time the whole story was violently denied in the papers, and an announcement inserted to the effect that the child had died suddenly of an unsuspected disease, and that the old peer, who had long been in feeble health, was definitely retiring to his country seat in Perthshire. There may be, of course, a certain number who, by one means and another, have come to a more accurate knowledge of the circumstances surrounding this extraordinary affair, but so far as I know this is the first time that the details have been laid before the public (if I may so classify this vagrant microcosm).

At the time the masculine clubs contented themselves with the bald assertion that the child had disappeared, but from the Lyceum Janet had brought a much more ornate account. According

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

to the general conviction of the habitués of these Aristotelean haunts, the Honourable Edward Mulhaven had been accosted by a frock-coated gentleman in De Vere Gardens as he—the Honourable Edward—perambulated homewards after his daily airing in Kensington Gardens. As his nurse not unnaturally combated the suggestion that her charge should accompany the frock-coated gentleman, baby, carriage, and nurse were whisked by some marvel of legerdemain into one of Backstone & Co.'s piano vans, which stood by the kerb, since when not the faintest trace of their existence had been discovered.

It was Tubby who recounted to me this amazing story.

"Who on earth would invent such nonsense?" I said.

Tubby chuckled.

"Lots of people—Backstone & Co. themselves, for instance. The methods of advertisement are legion. But as a matter of fact this does happen to be nonsense, although in general your comment would be particularly inappropriate. You remember Sherlock Holmes's famous thesis. In every problem, if you eliminate all the impossibles, that which remains, however improbable, must be the solution. You may quite reasonably substitute 'absurd' for 'improbable.' What I mean to say is that in this work of mine there cannot be a *reductio ad absurdum* in the strict sense of the phrase. In numbers of cases the logical consequence of the train of reasoning has been an apparent absurdity. But it has been

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE

none the less correct. Don't scorn the ridiculous, my dear Peter, or you will wander from the very solid highway of real life on to the stage of fiction and make-belief. *Credo quia incredibile* is another facet of the same crystal principle. Truth is so infinitely more wonderful than imagination. That is why, personally, I accept all things, even though I may not myself have tested them. Spiritualism, fairies, Christian Science, saintly vision, palmistry, the Miracles of Lourdes, and so on. To me this is the only reasonable attitude. Beauty is truth till you prove her a liar. So is the devil. Can anyone demonstrate? Well, then!" He shrugged his shoulders. "But this Lyceum tale chances to be imaginary as well as unreal. This morning——"

Carter threw open the door, interrupting him.

"Lady Mulhaven," he announced, and Tubby rose to confront the admittedly most beautiful woman of the last two London seasons.

"I am honoured, Lady Mulhaven," he said simply. "Will you sit by the window here? I am afraid we feel this heat somewhat in Osnaburg Street, and my friend and I have been smoking outrageously also." He wheeled one of the arm-chairs as he spoke and flung up the sash.

"Thank you."

She slipped off one of her gloves as she sat down, and it seemed to me, as I watched her from the hearthrug where I stood, that there was something of nervousness in the action. She laid it, however, together with a tiny handbag, upon the window-ledge with a little slow, deliberate

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

movement which contradicted my impression. Then she looked up at Tubby with a sudden brilliant smile.

"Are you as wonderful as your reputation?" she asked.

"Every bit," he returned cheerfully. "Since both are not at all. Which does not appear sense, but expresses mine exactly."

"It was extraordinarily lucid, and I understand perfectly," she said.

He sat down on the edge of the table and regarded her thoughtfully.

"You have come to consult me about the alleged disappearance of your little son?" he said.

"The disappearance," she corrected. "That was the one detail in which the various rumours were accurate."

"Will you tell me about it?"

"I would like to say first that, had I my will, you would have been asked to help us some days ago, but Lord Mulhaven was sceptical, and also he was quite assured that so important a personage as the heir to the Mulhaven title and estates could not remain long unfound. As it is, all Scotland Yard appears to have been unleashed, and the result is—nothing at all. At breakfast this morning I wrung from him a reluctant acquiescence, and came to you myself as soon as I had fulfilled a morning engagement. You know, of course, that my husband's health makes it almost impossible for him to go about."

"I quite appreciate that," Tubby murmured.

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE

"Then I will tell you everything just as it happened. Last Wednesday Parton—Edward's nurse—took him, as she does daily, to Kensington Gardens for his afternoon walk. It appears that she was very tired. She always has Tuesday evenings free for her own amusements, and I gather that last week they had been rather more violently frivolous than usual. At any rate, as Edward was sleeping peacefully, she drew the perambulator alongside one of the seats in the Flower Walk and followed his example. She insists that she did not doze for more than ten minutes, and that when she awoke with a start she rose at once and turned homewards. Baby was still lying quietly asleep, so that she did not pull back his veil to look at him."

"His veil?" Tubby queried.

"Edward has a peculiarly fair and delicate skin, and his eyes, too, are very sensitive to light. On very glaring days Nurse arranges a gauze veil across the front of the hood as some slight protection to both. She did not therefore see the baby until she lifted him from his perambulator on her arrival at Cornwall Gardens. Then—so cook tells me—she uttered a piercing scream and rushed into the house. I myself was at home at the time, and she came straight to my boudoir. 'My lady! my lady! He's stolen!' she cried. 'Stolen?' I repeated. 'What do you mean?' I really thought the woman had taken leave of her senses. She held out to me the baby in her arms. It was not Edward, but another child—a stranger."

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

I could see by Tubby's face that he was keenly interested.

"A substitute?"

"Exactly, Mr. Tubbs. A baby boy of about the same age apparently, but totally different in appearance, and indeed, as we are now learning, in disposition."

"You say totally different, Lady Mulhaven. Will you explain? Forgive me, but to us men I'm afraid all babies seem very much alike."

"I quite agree with you. But in this case there are quite glaring and undeniable points of difference. I spoke of Edward's unusually fair skin. This child is almost swarthy. Edward had a lot of light golden hair. This other is nearly bald, and such hair as he has promises to be dark. Edward's eyes were blue and sleepy-looking. This small usurper's are very wide awake and black. Again, my son is of an exceptionally happy, contented nature, but Nurse tells me that her new charge cries a great deal and is altogether difficult to manage."

"I see," said Tubby. "Quite an astonishing contrast. May I ask a few questions?"

"But certainly."

"Have you every confidence in your nurse?"

"I trust her absolutely. She was my own maid in Jo'burg."

"Ah, yes. Not a lady-nurse, then. Old or young?"

"Quite young. Twenty-seven or twenty-eight. No, not a lady. Just the ordinary maid class."

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE

"Is she—how do they put it?—walking out with anyone?"

Lady Mulhaven's eyebrows lifted slightly.

"Really, Mr. Tubbs, are these intimate researches in the life of one's domestics essential to the question in hand?"

"I think so. But perhaps you yourself are ignorant of such details. I presume I shall have an opportunity of questioning Parton myself?"

"Undoubtedly. As a matter of fact, however, I do happen to know, as I have encouraged the girl to talk to me of her affairs. She is something of a stranger in a strange land, you see."

"That is kind of you, Lady Mulhaven," said Tubbs gravely.

"She has an understanding, I believe, with a shop-assistant in the Fulham Road."

Tubby nodded.

"And what time did she choose for her sleep in Kensington Gardens?"

"Between three and three-forty-five. She was home by four o'clock as usual."

"Thank you. I think that is all. The affair seems, perhaps, rather inexplicable at the moment, but I have no doubt whatever that its solution is forthcoming."

"You speak confidently," she said. There was in her voice the least suggestion of something which I could not understand. Tubby also noticed it.

"I *feel* confident," he said curtly.

"You have formed an opinion?"

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

"Several. Perhaps you yourself have conceived a possible explanation?"

"Yes, Mr. Tubbs," she returned, a little flash of irritation showing in her tone. "I think the whole thing is the result of my husband's foolishness."

Tubbs waited without comment.

"You must have heard," she continued—"all London hears of his somewhat peculiar temper. In his business life I understand he made countless enemies by his intolerance, and there is many a household cursing him even now for the bad times that followed the bread-winner's summary dismissal. He was so proud of his son and heir that ever since the child's birth a year ago he has made himself and me ridiculous. One would have believed that there never was such a child, and the poor mite has been exhibited and fussed over until it is a marvel that Nurse has been able to keep him sweet-tempered and healthy. This devotion was public property. I feel convinced that someone who suffered in the past at Lord Mulhaven's hands is paying his debt, and that in a little time, after Lord Mulhaven has been sufficiently punished, the child will be returned."

She looked at Tubby with question in her eyes. He shook his head.

"You don't agree?"

"Not a bit."

"Why?" she demanded, obviously nettled.

"For many reasons." He shrugged his shoulders and rose. "Do you really wish me to take up the case, Lady Mulhaven?"

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE ♣

"Of course I do!" It was quite clear that she was astonished and a little disconcerted by the question. "My car is waiting. I hoped that, if you were able, you would return with me."

Suddenly, to my intense astonishment, for I confess I had been revolted by her detached and apparently callous demeanour, she sprang to her feet and clasped Tubby's arm.

"Oh, Mr. Tubbs!" she cried. "Don't you understand? It is *my* baby that is gone—*my baby!* If Lord Mulhaven suffers, surely I suffer a thousand times more! Think what the future would mean to me knowing always that my little one is cheated of a mother's love—perhaps uncared-for—perhaps even ill-treated! I lie awake and think and think of it until I believe I shall go mad."

She threw herself back into her chair and sobbed. Tubby bent down and patted her shoulder.

"Don't!" he said sharply. "I know you lie awake and think. Your face told me that before you spoke. And I shall find your baby. It is not that which troubles me. It is rather the doubt of giving him back to you."

"What do you mean?" she cried, lifting her face, flushed and wet with tears.

"What I say," he answered steadily.

Her lips quivered.

"You say nothing."

Tubby's eyes narrowed.

"I can say no more," he said quietly.

He stared gloomily at the blue sky showing above the line of roofing beyond the window.

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

"I suppose," he said, without looking at her, "you wouldn't consent to my sister taking on this investigation instead of me? You wouldn't see her——"

She interrupted.

"I don't understand."

"Don't you? My sister is as capable as I of reading the riddle, and she—she is a woman."

There was a note of appeal in his voice, and his face, when it turned, was tense and set like the face of a gambler who hazards much on a single throw.

A look, half puzzled, half wondering, crept into her face.

"I don't know why you wish it," she said slowly, as it were feeling her words one by one. "Nor yet what you are thinking, though something tells me that you are thinking wrong."

"I wish I were," he answered bitterly.

"In any case I hate women." She rose, put on her glove, and moved towards the door. "You will accompany me then, Mr. Tubbs?"

"No, Lady Mulhaven. There are just two points on which I want to assure myself. I will leave my visit till to-morrow afternoon. May I say four o'clock? In twenty-four hours much may happen. It is even possible to change one's mind. And second thoughts are notorious, are they not? And will you be good enough to tell Lord Mulhaven that I will deliver the missing heir into his arms quite safe and sound at the hour I mention?"

Once again she raised her eyebrows.

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE

"And his mother's arms?" she said.

"To you," Tubby returned gravely, "my promise was to find him, not to give him back."

Suddenly the colour rushed into her face, and her blue eyes flashed.

"Indeed, Mr. Athelstan Tubbs!" she cried. "Then since pledges seem the fashion, let me add mine to the list. And mark it well! These arms that were the first to hold my baby will hold him to the end. And that, in spite of all your English peerage and every man in Scotland Yard."

She flung back her head with a superb gesture, swept past him, and we heard the frou-frou of her skirts upon the stairs.

"Since the company is once more purely masculine," Tubby said after a pause, "I will recite to you a blasphemy. In every thousand women there is one only who can be really intensely annoyed without lapsing into the suggestion of a scratch. Lady Mulhaven is one of the nine hundred and ninety-nine. That last remark of hers was nasty in a feline kind of way. But in the pledge—as she puts it—there is a confidence, Peter, which I find disconcerting. Tell me, my friend, have I by some mischance or other missed a point?"

"As your whole attitude," I said, "from beginning to end of the interview was incomprehensible——"

"You are hardly in a position to judge. No, of course, that's true. Then I must consider the

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY ●

whole thing again and sound it out. First, however, I am going over to Cornwall Gardens."

"After all?" I queried.

"Ah, not to the lords and ladies. This time I go for other and less lofty purposes. It is Parton's night out."

He chuckled at my bewilderment.

"I fancy I may find her movements instructive. They are worth watching, anyhow."

He went into his bedroom and reappeared shortly in a seedy suit of serge and a somewhat shiny bowler.

"Why not come with me, old man?" he said.

I sprang up joyfully.

"Really?"

"Yes. Only not like that. Come and get into something less attractive." He took a shabby lounge coat and trousers of pepper-and-salt tweed from one of his wardrobes and flung them on the bed. "There are soft collars in the drawer there, and a few virulent ties. Any of them will do."

I gave a shout of laughter as I faced myself in the glass.

"Character costume is excellent for the pride," said Tubby. "One retains no delusions as to one's personal appearance after a few games of this kind. Who was it said the coat does not make the gentleman?"

"I don't know. Public opinion, I fancy."

"He is a liar," said Tubbs. "But I say, could you do anything with your moustache? It's painfully correct. Stand still a minute."

He brandished a pair of nail scissors, and

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE

almost before I realised his intentions had snipped it to that toothbrush stubble beloved alike of the subaltern and a certain type of unshaven navvy.

"Excellent!" he said, surveying me critically.

"But, good Lord, man——" I remonstrated.

"That's all right. It's an improvement. You can clean shave to-morrow. Much more convenient, since you seem to be taking to this business of mine. One must sacrifice something in the cause of art. What are you laughing at?"

"You and Janet always remind me of the first chapter in Genesis," I remarked.

He was not at all amused.

"Are we really like that? How utterly beastly! Please forgive me. I really hardly thought."

"That's the joy of it," I said.

He looked at me suspiciously, and then smiled.

"You mean it?"

"Of course I do."

"That's splendid, then. Come on."

As often happens in September, the heat of a belated summer's day died with the sun, and it was astonishingly cold as we dawdled about Cornwall Gardens, awaiting the release of the good Parton. It was six when we arrived in the immediate vicinity, and at a quarter to seven Tubby turned up his collar with a grunt.

"There's no under-nurse," he said. "I know that; and she puts her charge to bed before she sallies forth. What on earth time do babies go to bed?"

We had found a wall far from a gas lamp, and

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY ●

staving off the east wind which blew with shrewdness and unusual energy. We were leaning up against the bricks and trying to feel good-humoured. I wondered vaguely how he knew these features of Lady Mulhaven's nursery régime, but felt too depressed by the climatic condition to put the question into words.

A door clicked somewhere, and we heard the clang of a near gate. Tubby lurched to an equilibrium and grabbed my shoulder.

"Here she comes!" he muttered.

Even as he spoke she tripped by within a dozen feet of us, a neat little figure in nurse's bonnet, her cloak fluttering as she went.

"Delayed by something or other," whispered Tubby. "No time to change into unofficial finery, nor even to button her cape."

We slouched out brazenly and followed in her wake. Cornwall Gardens was deserted, and our footsteps raised the echoes, but Parton paid no heed. Probably her mind was bent on her own pleasure and the agreeable hours of the immediate future. In a few minutes we were in a well-frequented thoroughfare where there was no likelihood of our pursuit being noticeable.

"Cromwell Road," Tubby said. "Which way is she going? Keep your eye on her, Peter."

Then he relapsed into silence, and when I looked at him a few minutes later his face had taken upon itself that expression of blank immobility which I knew betokened concentration and a hard-working brain. He was testing his theories as he had foretold he would need to do.

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE

We were some way down the Fulham Road when I touched him on the arm. He came to himself with a start.

"She's gone in there," I said.

He stared across the road in the direction I pointed. Half a dozen shops elbowed each other, and seemed to grumble at their lack of growing space.

"Not the hairdresser's?"

"Yes," I answered.

He chuckled gleefully.

Our quarry's cover, however, was only temporary. She emerged almost immediately, companioned by a man who beamed upon her with a smile as unctuous as his hair. The latter shone so amazingly in the gaslight—he carried his hat in his hand, and clapped it on only when he had fallen into step beside her—that even my untrained intelligence, noting this feature and the unhealthy, dough-like colour of his face, would have voted him a barber's assistant without the added evidence of the shop itself. The two of them came to a standstill at a greengrocer's some doors away, and she pointed to a picture hanging above the fruit and vegetables. He looked up eagerly and nodded, laughing. Then they turned away, their chins in the air and importance in every movement of their retreating forms.

Tubbs watched them critically until they were lost amongst the other pedestrians of that cosmopolitan thoroughfare. Then he turned and looked at me.

"Peter, old man, could you stand a shave?"

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

"What—my moustache again?"

"Your chin's too clean," he said apologetically. "So is mine. The toothbrush is a godsend, if you don't really mind."

"Not a bit," I said resignedly.

As we crossed the road Tubby darted from my side. Opposite the greengrocer's he, too, stopped and stared as had stared Parton and her young man. Then he returned to me, and together we entered the little poky saloon.

The proprietor was stropping razors. He did not hurry to attend us, and after a contemplation of our figures in one of the mirrors, I found myself sympathising with his lack of enthusiasm. We were not promising customers.

"Can you do us a shave, mate?" asked Tubby genially.

"Both of you?"

"No—him." He jerked his head in my direction. "His girl's took a fancy for a smooth face—says it's more gentlemanly, and he's taking her out to-night."

I sat down on one of the stools and was enveloped in a not irreproachable jacket. Tubby sat alongside and lit a cigarette.

"Have one?" he said, offering them.

"Don't mind if I do," said the proprietor. "Tuesday's a slack night. Don't suppose I shall have another customer before I close." He flourished a soapy brush and lathered me.

"Lucky, as your man's out."

"That's so." He spoke gloomily and glanced at the door with regret in his eyes.

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE ♣

"I hear you're losing him altogether," Tubbs said after a pause.

"That's so too," the old man growled. "Gave me notice to-day. How d'you know it?"

"There's a pal of mine as knows him," Tubby said easily. "He's been talking of it, I suppose. My pal says to me: 'You have a shot at the job.'"

"That your trade, then?" said the other.

"Not this sort," Tubby returned modestly. "Too classy for me. I couldn't touch it. White-chapel's more in my line. I'm all right there. Not in the West End, though. Not yet, anyway, though I may get to it some day."

The old man was obviously flattered.

"I don't mind teaching anyone as is handy, and has the right spirit," he said. "What's your wages?"

But Tubby was obdurate.

"No," he said, shaking his head. "I know my limitations. I ain't up to this by a long chalk. What for did that long fool of yours want to give it up? Come into a bit of money, hasn't he?"

"Something of the kind. He's getting married. His girl comes from South Africa, and nothing'll suit her but that they heads back there. Her mistress is standing the passage, I take it, and they're setting up on their own. As you say, there's a bit of money somewhere, for I'll take my oath he's never saved it while he's with me. Some folks never know when they're well off. Slept on the premises, he did. A sitting-room to himself, too, where he could have his girl when she could get away. She'd come along of an after-

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

noon sometimes with the pram, and if we wasn't busy I'd give him an hour off, and there they'd be billing and cooing, with the babbie sleeping like a top."

"Uncommon good of you, I call it," Tubby said enviously. "Not many chaps got a boss like that."

"You're right," agreed the old man. "But I always says, if my lads consider me, I do the same by them. He was a good worker, and he got his pay back, over and beyond his week's salary"

"So I should say!" Tubby said solemnly "She came in last week, didn't she, boss?"

"She did that," the boss asserted. "An all afternoon sitting. Here at 2.15 she was, and the pram down in the shop, and her and him and the little 'un up in his sitting-room till nearly four. Nine customers I had, and me a-calling up the stairs after him time and again, and, 'Coming, sir!' says he likewise down 'em, but never showing himself. And when he does come the place was empty. 'Bye-bye, darling,' says he. 'Mind he don't catch cold.' And she giggles fit to kill herself. 'Who—me?' I says, angry-like, for I was streaming with the heat. 'No, not you, uncle dear,' says she, blowing a kiss. 'He's a naughty boy to leave you. Tell him I said so. But it was really all my fault.' He was that sorry and apologising I couldn't say much. 'Dock my wages, boss,' he says. 'I deserve it. But there, it's only once in your life as you're in love.' I tell you, my lad, take him all round, he's as good a chap as I've had, and I'm sorry to lose him."

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE

Very smart at his work, too. Clip a man quicker than I could myself."

Tubby caught my eye in the glass and rose.

"Improves him, sir, don't it?" he said as the jacket was removed from my weary shoulders.

I planked down a shilling and refused the change.

"I'm flush just now," I said. "You drink our healths, boss." From the jubilation of Tubby's countenance I had gathered that some such offering was not undue payment for benefits received.

"I'm sorry you're losing him," my friend said as we crossed the threshold. "But I can't help feeling he's more than a jay to make a change. Tell you, sir, when I'm more fitted——"

He nodded his head knowingly, and the old man smacked him on the back.

"You come along when you like, my lad," he said generously, as I and this newborn tonsorial aspirant slouched off.

When we were well out of sight of shop and proprietor alike, Tubby stopped and rubbed his hands.

"Gosh, what luck!" cried he. "What incredible luck! Peter, whenever you see symptoms of my growing top-heavy with a sense of my own astuteness—and they do appear sometimes—just remind me that in five cases out of ten, for some unaccountable reason, the gods are on my side. That's point one on which I needed information."

"And the other?"

"The other belongs to to-morrow. Shall we taxi? I'm dead tired."

He hailed a passing car whose chauffeur looked

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY ●

askance at such shabby fares, but smiled at a whispered word from Tubby and touched his cap.

As we sank back on the cushions Tubby sighed.

"The other," he repeated, "is George Fortescue and the Berkeley Hotel."

It was not until I was drowsily turning matters over in my mind in that delicious half-hour that prefaces a night's repose, that I remembered who George Fortescue was.

Tubbs turned up at Chelsea by lunch-time next day in accordance with arrangement. He seemed harassed and depressed.

"No luck," he said, sitting down, unfolding his napkin and nodding to my offer of cold beef.

"He was out when I reached the hotel at ten o'clock and has not yet been back. I hung about all morning. He leaves to-night. Some of his trunks are already strapped and down. Hôtel l'Athénée, Paris. Corroboration, and that's all."

He crumbled some bread between his fingers and pondered.

"He was at Oxford with you?" he said at last.

"The first year," I answered. "Sent down, you know."

"I know. What was it all about?"

"No one knew the ins and outs. A series of futile pranks, I believe. There may have been worse underneath, but I doubt it. He was not the type. He never did a stroke of work, of course, though he was brilliantly clever. He enlisted in the Imperial Yeomanry in 1900."

"When he was sent down?"

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE ♣

"Exactly. Went to London and took the shilling on the spot. He was out almost at once. A splendid horseman and a crack shot."

"Did you hear anything further of him?"

"Yes. He wrote to me at Oxford about a bill he had left. I paid it for him. He was having a 'filthy time'—his own expression."

"Most of 'em did. You know he was recommended for the V.C. in 1902. Reported missing, and then presumed dead."

"No," I said, "I didn't. To tell the truth, I forgot his very existence. The name was familiar when you mentioned it last night, but it was hours before I placed it."

"A month or so ago he turned up in England—quite quietly. I saw no comment upon it anywhere. Janet met him at a dance at Lady Belgrave's—his aunt, you know. She sat out one dance with him, and they chattered of everything in general and nothing in particular. Suddenly he stopped in the middle of a sentence. He recovered himself in a moment and finished it quite naturally and sensibly. But Janet had turned to him. His face was ashy, and she followed his eyes. Lady Mulhaven had just entered the room. Later on he asked casually: 'Who's that pretty girl in black over there by the door?' 'Which?' said Janet. 'The tall fair one with diamonds in her hair.' Janet told him, and he asked a lot of questions about her—how long she'd been married—was she happy?—what was Lord Mulhaven like, and so on."

"But what on earth has all this to do with

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

the abduction of the Honourable Edward ? ” I asked.

“ Unfortunately a very great deal. George Fortescue happens to be the next heir to the peerage,” Tubby said grimly.

I stared at him in amazement.

“ George Fortescue ? ” I ejaculated.

“ George Fortescue. When that lad bolted from the misery of a thoroughly unsatisfactory career, he was the youngest of three brothers—children of Lord Mulhaven’s youngest brother. His connection with the peerage seemed as remote as the Millennium. His father and his bachelor uncle died within six months of each other two years ago. His own eldest brother was killed at Magersfontein, and Philip, his second brother, died last January of heart-disease. Were it not for this small and entirely unexpected baby—remember, the old man married at seventy—George the erstwhile ne’er-do-well would be the prospective Lord Mulhaven. Now you see his connection with this entirely beastly affair.”

He flung down his napkin and began to pace up and down.

“ Listen ! ” he said. “ It will do me good to re-state the whole case to you, as I have put it to myself about ten times already, beginning with——”

“ Lady Mulhaven’s visit,” I said, for his extraordinary attitude during the short interview was still puzzling me.

“ By no means,” he returned. “ But with my own visit to Lord Mulhaven five hours earlier.”

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE

"What?" I cried.

"At ten o'clock yesterday morning Lord Mulhaven telephoned for me to see him at Cornwall Gardens. I went obediently, and spent an interesting hour with him. He told me the story just as Lady Mulhaven told it, with one important difference. You will remember she proffered his unwillingness as the reason of the delay. He maintained that he would have called me in last week had it not been for his wife's opposition to the proposal. She hated private detectives, she said. They were detestable and utterly useless. He had declared emphatically at breakfast that morning that, objection or no objection, he would appeal to me, and, being very much an old gentleman of his word, he did so forthwith. When he had finished his account I asked a few questions and requested to see the baby. Lord Mulhaven was surprised. He saw no point in my doing so—anyway he wouldn't have the brat down there—he had seen it once only since the thing happened—had no wish to see it again—if I chose to go to the nurseries, etc. etc. I did choose, and a rigid footman escorted me upstairs. Here I interviewed the worthy Parton. His majesty the baby was asleep. I lifted him myself from his cot, and was interested to find that, contrary to the universal custom in regard to infants' hair, these locks had been *cut*. Extraordinarily well cut, I admit—incredibly well. I am convinced that, had I not expected it, I should never have detected the fact. His skin, too, was not *au naturel*, as the menu cards say. No, it wasn't in the least

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY ●

obvious. One found the information in unexpected places—the inside of his tiny ears, between his toes, and in an occasional crinkle. But his eyes, bless you, were as blue as his mother's when he opened them. There was a bottle on the mantelshelf marked 'THE DROPS—NOT TO BE TAKEN.' Every detail was too ridiculously open and simple when you were looking for it."

"But how came you to be looking for it?"

Tubby waved aside the interruption.

"You put me out of my stride," he said. "Let me go my own way, old man." He paused and gathered up his thread. "'He's a fine little fellow,' I said to Parton. 'Someone will be missing him. It's an extraordinary affair.' I did not want her at that period to credit me with suspicions. 'It is indeed, sir,' she said, producing a handkerchief. 'And to think that my carelessness should have been the cause! I feel as if I could drown myself.' She mopped her eyes and sniffed. My good Peter, histrionic talent is infinitely more common amongst women than amongst us. And it wasn't overdone. 'Such a darling as the little changeling is, too, for that matter.' There was a subtle touch about this that astonished me. She took him from my arms and dandled him while he gurgled cheerfully. 'Ah, well,' I said, 'I hope very soon to find the original, Parton. Was there anything noticeable about the clothes in which this young gentleman made his first appearance?' She fetched a bundle from a neighbouring drawer. The garments seemed to me of a weird and won-

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE ♣

derful shape, but she assured me they were an infant's normal wear. They were all obviously new. There seemed no point in questioning further. One hates to court lies, and there was no likelihood of her giving me anything else, so I came away. You see, Peter, Parton's story, as delivered by Lord Mulhaven, was not sufficiently plausible. There were too many improbabilities. One can always swallow a certain amount if there seem sufficient reason for so taxing one's credulity. Personally, I find my digestion will more readily negotiate one large, bold unlikelihood than a number of little ones. Honestly, I do not believe it would be possible for this amazing conjuring feat to have been accomplished at the place and hour given. The Flower Walk is a favourite resort, and I doubt whether any five minutes of that particular time of day sees it entirely free of passers-by. At any rate it would be only by a remote chance. Secondly, Parton is a particularly careful nurse. Lord Mulhaven assured me of that several times, and of her quite unusual attention to details, and her superiority. That she should have fallen asleep in a public place such as Kensington Gardens, when in charge, or indeed at any time, rather sticks in my throat. A Peckham Rye nursemaid might so wander from the paths of rectitude, but a uniformed nurse in a titled family!—It simply isn't done. Again, I never yet knew a really attentive nurse who, after a long rest with a sleeping infant, did not peep to see that he were safe and happy before going upon her way. It is an instinct. They do funny

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

things—these little embryonic forces in the wagging of the world—duck their noses under the clothes and suffocate—swallow their comforters or their own fist. Suppose, for the sake of argument, this woman had fallen asleep, as she says. She admits her own horror at her misdeed. The very first thing she would have done would be to lift that veil which Lady Mulhaven told us of. Well, there are three points; there were others, but these alone would have persuaded me that for some reason or other the tale was not genuine. Then the contrast. It was too complete. Fair skin—swarthy. Much light hair—little or no dark. Blue eyes—black. Placidity—fretfulness. They would have been safer with so much less. You will notice that often in the really criminal class—they damn themselves by the exaggeration of their own precaution. So I went to the nursery for exactly what I found. The Honourable Edward was not so black as he was painted, in more ways than one. To lay at his door the trouble agitating at that moment the heart of his aristocratic old father was entirely unfair. He had never deserted the paternal roof, and it needs only a good hot bath at four this afternoon to demonstrate the fact indisputably. Had the case entailed only the restoration of the lost baby, the matter would have been simple enough. But when it comes to author and motive we are wading into deeper and muddier water. I asked myself to whose advantage was the removal of this baby, and could suggest no one who derived benefit save the next heir. But, then, why this

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE

elaborate scheme of substitution? Surely it would have been simpler to have removed the child altogether. As it is, he is removed in name but not in person. What force, while sacrificing his inheritance, would strive to keep his presence? There seemed to me one only—love, and an exceedingly strong love. No casual affection would have elaborated such a scheme or run such risks. I am putting all this argument just as it came into my mind. I ran over the possibilities. The father was breaking his heart over the loss—really, not histrionically. The nurse? It was conceivable, indeed it was very likely, that she was a paid accomplice; but this plan in no way insured her retention of the child, since either she or the boy might be ejected from the house at any moment. There remained the mother. Granted that the small heir to the Mulhaven title had to be eliminated, at least she kept her son. Even if Lord Mulhaven were averse to adopting the little usurper, it would only be a question of persuasion. Is that clear and sound?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well, then. Here was I faced with a solution in which the mother and the heir played equally prominent parts, and I could establish no connection between them. I did not even know who the heir was. I ran into Janet's flat on my way home. She's a kind of walking Debrett. Consequently I have ignored the study lately, on the principle that you can't know everything, and when ready and reliable reference is possible, it is equally effectual to refer. 'George Fortescue,

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

of course,' said she. 'Do you mean to say you don't know that?' Then she elaborated for me all the diseases and deceases of the Mulhaven house, drew a little tree with George at the bottom, and faced me with a serious face. 'Why did George Fortescue want to know all about Lady Mulhaven that night?' said she. 'What night?' said I. Even Janet is annoying at times. Then followed the story of the dance. We sat down and worked the whole scheme out in detail—both in conception and organisation. After which, since Janet was due to lecture at a girls' school in Chester yesterday evening, and I to give you lunch at 1.30, we parted; she to fling garments into a suit-case, and I to taxi to Osnaburg Street at great speed and much expense."

"Lecture? Janet?" I said. "On what?"

"Lord knows! Anything," returned he. "My dear boy, I am ever perceiving more and more clearly that all things come to an end save that girl's amazing versatility, which is exceeding broad."

"And her theory of the case?" I asked.

Tubby stared.

"Our theory," he said with emphasis, "was this: Fortescue and Lady Mulhaven had met at some time previous to the latter's marriage—where or how, of course we did not know. Lady Mulhaven's mention of Jo'burg yesterday explained matters. It had been during the South African War. He was an old lover of hers, and is reported dead. She comes over here, and since it was no longer possible to marry for love, marries for

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE ●

money and position, as numberless women have done before and will continue to do so long as the world endures. Everything is as happy as is possible, lacking the one thing needful, and a child is born. Fortescue returns, recognises her, and makes himself known. Their feelings towards each other are the same as ever. Now hear the laughter of the gods! Peter, I am immutably convinced that the violation of conscience bears in itself the seed of its own damnation. She has sacrificed love at the altar of rank materialism, and inevitably materialism itself mocks her. Had she remained faithful to her own heart she might have had wealth, love, title, in one beautiful whole, whereas now, by her own act, she has cut off irrevocably the glory that might have been hers. She has borne a child to a man she doesn't love—a man old enough to be her grandfather, and from whom every instinct of her warm youth and idealism must have revolted—and that very child takes from her true mate the title, wealth, and honour she should have shared. If she claim the love which is assuredly hers, she loses at one blow not these only, but her child also and her good name. Then comes the subtle suggestion of this way of escape. The total disappearance of the Honourable Edward insures the inheritance for George Fortescue, and, engineered according to this plan, her own retention of her son. She knows Lord Mulhaven well enough to be sure that he will not wish to keep this stranger child. She will join her lover, taking the boy with her. In conception the scheme seems elaborate, but

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

in operation it was extraordinarily simple. On that Wednesday afternoon Parton left the Gardens early—if indeed she ever went there—and took the child to our friend the barber's; he corroborated the assumption, you remember. This, of course, was all arranged beforehand. Parton's young man was to be subsidised for his share in the affair. That was inevitable. Lady Mulhaven would pay heavily for silence, probably get them out of the country. It was on the strength of this surmise and the greengrocer's picture that I hazarded the suggestion that he was throwing up his job."

"The picture?" I queried.

"A fruit farm. They walked off with an air of presumptive proprietorship. We never heard the good man's name. Call him James. He looked it. James, then, is a smart lad. He crops the child's hair and mildly stains the little that remains; he and she darken the little fellow's skin with walnut juice or some such concoction, dress and tuck him up again, and the good Parton wheels him home. We have the little scene on the steps for the benefit of cook and all whom it may interest, and the journey to my lady's boudoir to say that all is well and ready for the next scene in the drama."

"But the eyes?" I objected.

"Belladonna—a dangerous game too—but you'll understand the only person it was necessary to deceive was Lord Mulhaven. They did not anticipate that the police would minutely examine the child. Why should they? What possible

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE ●

reason should the police have for imagining that Lord Mulhaven would call in Scotland Yard to investigate an abduction which never took place and restore a child who had never been removed? Scotland Yard is nothing if not simple and straightforward. If she is called in to investigate a burglary, she casts around for a thief. The invariable assumption is that the man who calls in the police actually needs the assistance of the law. It is an excellent principle, but, like every rule, has its exception, as in this case."

"What about the change of temper?" I queried.

Tubby shrugged his shoulders.

"We have that on the authority of interested people—the nurse and the mother. On occasion, a tape too tight or a surreptitious pinch. Most babies will cry to order. It probably only happened once—when it was taken to Lord Mulhaven. He was chirpy enough when I handled him. Well, then, everything went swimmingly until Lord Mulhaven's suggestion as to my unworthy self became too insistent. Lady Mulhaven does me the honour to be afraid of me. Finding she cannot avoid me, she does the best thing she can devise under the circumstances—fetches me herself and assures me of her wish to do so days ago. That, of course, tends to deflect suspicion, should it by some remote mischance turn her way. Unfortunately, unknown to her I had already seen Lord Mulhaven. I had all the facts, had seen Janet, and had evolved my theory of the whole case. It is true that the hair-

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY ♣

dresser's shop and its surrounding details were still undiscovered, but a confederate of some sort had been entered by Janet and myself amongst the *dramatis personæ*—a confederate, male or female, living somewhere on the route Parton took on the memorable afternoon. We hazarded an admirer—hence my question to Lady Mulhaven on the subject. With that one exception when she entered the room yesterday, the whole sequence in my mind was as complete as I have sketched it out for you. I knew she was lying. I knew why. I was convinced she meant to bolt with Fortescue. Her face confirmed me in my belief. You thought her heartless. I knew she was not so. You were surprised at her little outbreak. I was not. The first few sentences were pure acting. She felt the atmosphere too tame for the bereaved mother. She played up. Then, beyond her control, the real mother, the real woman spoke—not to you and me, but to herself. She rehearsed her own feelings in order to justify herself to herself. And yet—there's the point that troubles me, Peter."

"What?" I said.

"Her personality."

He had come to a standstill some time ago, delivering the latter half of his explanation from the hearthrug. Now he resumed his slow pacing to and fro.

"Her personality?" I echoed.

"See here, Peter. Has this view of the problem quite elucidated to you my attitude yesterday afternoon?"

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE

"Perfectly," I returned.

"Has it entirely explained hers?"

"No," I said at last. "Not quite."

"Nor yet to me," he said. "There's a flaw somewhere in the reasoning; yet every link of it holds good."

"It seems extraordinarily sound."

"There's no other possible explanation," he muttered. "And yet—ah, well, we must get on. I'll go and tidy up a bit if I may. Doubtless Cornwall Gardens at four will settle much uncertainty."

"One thing I fail to see," I remarked.

He paused with his hand on the door-knob.

"Why you wanted George Fortescue this morning."

He looked at me for a minute without speaking.

"He's a decent chap really," he said vaguely.

"And this is a futile, rotten thing to do."

At Cornwall Gardens the door was opened by the rigid footman, and we were ushered immediately into Lord Mulhaven's presence. The old man looked ghastly. He made an attempt to rise from his armchair, but smiled apologetically and motioned Tubby to approach.

"I thought I would tell you myself, Mr. Tubbs," he said, "that the matter is finished. I have received information this morning of the—of the death of my dear son. The trouble has been due to a misunderstanding, his death to— to an unfortunate accident. I make no doubt that you will quite comprehend both the affair itself and the unspeakable pain it is occasioning

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

me. My wife"—he looked hard at Tubby, and a sudden light sprang into the dull old eyes—"my wife has gone with this little nameless one, left her in place of him that was my son—has gone to my place in Scotland, whither I hope soon to follow her. From what she tells me I feel we are greatly in your debt. You will allow me to thank you for a consideration and a delicacy none too common nowadays."

He held out his hand, which my friend took, and five minutes later we were walking back along the Cromwell Road.

"A splendid lie," Tubby said at last. "A splendid lie whereby before the world he keeps untarnished the honour of his house. It is just that kind of thing that trips the Socialist. Would it create a disturbance, think you, if I walked bareheaded for a while? It would? Well, never mind. I took my hat off long ago. But I don't see clear all the same."

He continued his way regardless of bus or taxi, a black frown on his forehead, and I trudged in sympathetic silence by his side. By the time we reached Osnaburg Street I was no further enlightened, nor, I think, was he. We were both exceedingly tired, however, and very grateful for the excellent tea which Mrs. Carter promptly served. Later Tubbs rang up the Berkeley and assured himself that Fortescue was gone. Then he lit his pipe and brooded over the fire. It must have been close upon nine when he suddenly spoke. A book which lay unopened on his knee shot into the fender as he sprang to his feet.

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE

"Ye gods!" he cried. "I've got it! Lord, what a fool I've been!"

He darted to the bell and we heard it pealing in the lower regions. Then he rushed to the head of the stairs.

"Carter—that you? Round to Morley's garage—quick! Ask for Spinks. Tell him I want the fastest car they've got. Dover. Yes—Dover, you ass! D-O-V-E-R. Good Lord, boy, haven't you yet learned never to be astonished? Dover—to catch the night boat, if possible. Spinks, if he's in, remember. If not, the best man Morley's got. Oh, and say I'll pay fines."

He turned back into the room.

"Now, Peter, my boy, are you coming, or aren't you? It's Dover if we're lucky. Paris to-morrow if we're not. Mistakes are expensive luxuries."

"Of course I'm coming," I said.

"Good man! Look out some necessaries and stick them in a suit-case. You'll find two or three under my bed. The little one will fit us. No, nothing fancy—just our own unadorned selves this time. A couple of caps for the boat. Don't forget. I expect we'll cross."

It is astounding how quickly, from companionship with a man of much journeying, one achieves the philosophic simplicity of the nomadic soul. Six months back a mere week-end at Brighton was fraught with nerve-wracking preparation. A list of requirements brooded over, emended, checked—bags packed and unpacked—a dozen doubtful articles considered, reconsidered and taken,

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

absolute essentials invariably left or lost. Now one travelled to Scotland—Paris—America probably, if need be—with another man's pyjamas, half a dozen collars, a pocket comb and a tooth-brush. Socks, shirts, and handkerchiefs were bought *en route*. In Tubby's case was added a small volume of verse which no persuasion would induce him to omit. He read it invariably after he was in bed, vowing it prompted sweet slumber and was peculiarly good for the soul. I have a vivid recollection of watching him so occupied in a hut, indifferently weather-proof, upon the Riffal Alp whither a pursuit once took us. Enveloped in his rug and lit by our one candle, he lay propped on his elbow on the damp and dirty floor, radiantly happy, mumbling melodious iambics and hurling an occasional genial curse at the guttering and rapidly dwindling stump of tallow.

The car was round within five minutes, and we slipped on our coats and tucked ourselves in with rugs.

The chauffeur leaned round as Carter banged the door upon us.

"Cold, sir!" he said.

"Ah, Spinks? I'm in luck. Now, look here. Hang the limit. An extra pound if you get the boat."

"I doubt it, sir, but I'll try."

"Do your best. That's all I ask."

"I will that."

He slipped in the clutch and we glided away from the curb. He drove with unusual skill, edging in and out amongst the traffic in a manner

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE ●

which, despite his regulation speed, gained minutes in every street.

Once beyond Bromley, however, he flung discretion to the winds. I shall never forget that drive. It was a night of inky blackness through which one shot at an incredible pace for, it seemed, innumerable hours. Now and then the straggling lights of village windows pierced the curtain that surrounded us, and twice we slowed up and negotiated a town. The first, I think, was Maidstone. I felt the brakes as we slackened down the hill and the fourfold jar as we crossed the metals of the level-crossing at its foot. Bright-lit windows, shops, people slid by at appropriate speed, then Spinks's foot drove down the accelerator and we resumed our break-neck pace. The other was Canterbury. A narrow street along which the car ran decorously plunged us without warning into the very middle of the town, where even at this time there was quite enough traffic to evidence the wisdom of our restrained approach. Then sharp to the right into the country roads again, into utter blackness and air that fought against our reckless onslaught and cut our faces in return. And through it all Tubby sat hunched back against the cushions wrapped in a silence as impenetrable as the night itself.

It was only on the high road outside Dover that he stirred.

"Oh, Peter!" he said. "She's off!"

Spinks slowed up as he spoke.

"No good, sir!" he cried, pointing ahead.

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

We could see the lights twinkling in the harbour, the long line of the Admiralty Pier, and one little constellation that moved slowly away.

"That's her," he added. "I know the look of her. I did this same game a month ago. The gentleman shook his fist and cursed on this very spot. We started a good fifteen minutes earlier, too, sir."

"Yes," said Tubby. "You've been magnificent. So has the car. The Lord Warden, then. We must put up there and wait till the morning."

It was exactly four o'clock on the following day when we walked into the Hôtel l'Athénée. Tubby demanded the proprietor himself, and talked to him in voluble and rapid French. Then he came back to me.

"All right, thank the gods! They're in the foyer. I'm going straight to them."

I followed him, and on the threshold of the big, airy room he stood and looked around for those he sought. There were some twenty or thirty people scattered about the apartment, but Lady Mulhaven was a woman not easy to mistake or overlook. She and George Fortescue were seated at a small table by a window at the far end, and the afternoon sun was streaming with extraordinary radiance upon her wonderful hair. I have heard the word "golden" applied many times, but in her case it was genuinely descriptive. The quite unfashionable coils that rounded her small head had all the glint and high lights of yellow metal.

Tubby saw her at the same moment as myself,

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE

and without any hesitation moved in her direction, threading his way in and out amongst tables and people, regardless of the eyes turned upon him or of anything save his fixed purpose.

Lady Mulhaven's back was towards us, so that, strangely enough, it was I who first claimed recognition. George Fortescue was bending forward, listening to something she was saying, and he watched meanwhile our approach with the lazy, half-conscious interest which is the usual tribute to unknown new-comers. Suddenly, however, as we drew near, he sprang to his feet.

"Good Lord, Margery!" he said. "There's old Peter Brown—the one man in all the world I most want to meet."

The words were audible to everyone in the room. He came forward to meet us.

"By Jove, Peter, this is splendid! I've owed you four pounds ten for close upon six years. Thank the Lord I can clear it. I've been on your track ever since I landed six weeks ago, but couldn't find your burrow."

Lady Mulhaven turned. For the fraction of a minute she looked at me, and then her eyes rested on Athelstan Tubbs. Not a feature quivered, but slowly the colour drifted from her face until she sat there like some quiet and beautiful statue clothed in the garments of modern life.

"Well, Mr. Tubbs!" she said at last.

I glanced at my companion, and was astounded at the expression of his face. It was as white as her own, set with a determination as inexorable as fate, yet with a light of such extraordinary

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

sweetness in his eyes that I found myself suddenly realising why I—Peter Brown—the most normal and unsentimental of creatures, had in a few short months conceived for him an affection such as I had never felt for any man before. The explanation was after all quite simple. There was in him something which hitherto I had not met. It showed now in his face, as unmistakable as it was indescribable, as he bent towards the woman he had come to seek.

"I owe you a very deep apology," he said simply. "I am here to offer it."

He stood before her, motionless, humble, waiting, but with his eyes looking straight into hers. For fully half a minute she stared back at him in silence. There was wonder and relief in her expressive face. I do not know which predominated. Then quite suddenly she broke into a ripple of laughter.

"But indeed, how impossible!" she cried. "Rather it is I who owe you thanks. I told Lord Mulhaven so, as soon as I understood."

"I owe you a deep apology," he repeated doggedly. "You did not understand. I think, unpleasant as it is, I must explain."

He looked round. There was no one in our immediate neighbourhood, but apparently he was not satisfied.

"Perhaps the balcony?" he suggested.

Fortescue opened the French window, and the four of us passed through. There were several deck-chairs leaning against the house wall. Tubby fetched one, placing it for Lady Mulhaven,

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE

whilst he himself leaned back against the stone balustrade. It was clear that, so far as he was concerned, Fortescue and I had ceased to exist.

Lady Mulhaven's blue eyes looked up into his.

"You seem almost tragic," she said.

There was a little nervous ring in her tone. Something of his tension had communicated itself to her. He seemed not to hear.

"You came to me yesterday afternoon," he said, "to ask my help in discovering the whereabouts of your child. Chance had meted out to me knowledge which gave the lie to all your story. I had my case complete—a theory which then fitted and still fits all the facts. But in the chain of it one point was lacking. It was by virtue of this omission that I condemned you. It is for the omission, not the condemnation, that I ask your pardon. I mean—but for the omission I should still condemn."

He spoke bluntly, almost brutally.

"And what was the omission?" she queried.

"It did not occur to me," he said, "that you were Fortescue's wife."

The colour flared in her face as if he had struck her.

"Not his wife?" she said. "You thought——"

"I thought," he continued, not having the least intention of sparing himself an iota of the unpleasantness at which he had hinted—"I thought that you were insuring the title for the lover with whom you meant to run away."

Her brow puckered whilst she took in the full force of this pregnant sentence.

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

It was George Fortescue who spoke.

"Crimminy!" he cried. "You seem to have painted us a pretty pair of villains. Was it with handcuffs, then, that you came round to the Berkeley yesterday?"

"No," answered Tubby gravely. "I came round to tell you what a blackguard you were." But his eyes were still on Mrs. Fortescue.

Suddenly her own filled with tears.

"Thank you, Mr. Tubbs. I told you I owed you thanks. In any case your advice was wisest, was it not?"

"My advice?"

"You sent me home with twenty-four hours wherein to lay it all before Lord Mulhaven."

Tubby crimsoned.

"I sent you home with time to redeem your character, if that's what you mean," he said bitterly.

"You put it so," she answered quickly. "But even if so, it's true. What would he have thought of me, if he had never known the truth?"

"And as it is?"

"As it is, he knows everything. He was utterly splendid. I never loved him until I said good-bye. He kissed me as if he were my father, and thanked me for the many things I'd done for him."

Tubby pondered.

"You just meant to disappear?" he said at last.

She nodded.

"Ah—don't you see? Had he thought the

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE ♣

child his son, he would have claimed him, even though he divorced me. To tell him the truth was to brand my boy for ever. But this little changeling. What was it to him? I could take with me a baby, nameless, if you will, but not disgraced, and always my very own. He would have hushed up the scandal. I know him. And it was only for a short time. The doctors say he cannot live a year." Her eyes grew suddenly wistful. "If only I could have stayed with him to the end!"

George Fortescue got up.

"It was my fault, you know, Tubbs. I should have cleared, as soon as I found how things were. I meant to do so. And then we came face to face in High Street, Kensington, and there was no more to be said."

"You married in Johannesburg?"

Fortescue nodded.

"Then I was wounded in the head and taken prisoner. An old Boer farmer looked after me. I don't know exactly how it happened. The war was well over by the time I had my full senses. There was a Jo'burg paper I came across with her name in as dead—a cousin it was, of the same name. Anyway I was sick and ill and weary of everything. The old man told me I was reported dead. I stayed so, till the lust for the old country came to me and I ran over—to find practically all my family gone and that my dead wife was not dead, but married to another man. In my own mind I still have a conviction that I cannot kill. The decent thing was to have remained dead."

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY

Mrs. Fortescue laid her hand upon his knee.

"That's nonsense, George," she said, but in her voice there was a quality of sadness which somehow belied her words.

"And the automobile you ordered," she cried, "will have been waiting this half-hour."

"Will you two join us?" Fortescue said. "The Bois, and tea at the Café de la Cascade?"

Tubby shook his head.

"Thank you," he answered. "We are heading straight home."

He turned, leaned over the balustrade, and looked into the street.

"Yes, it's there," he said.

Then he straightened himself and held out his hand.

"I am forgiven?"

"You are forgiven," she returned.

I made my adieux and followed him.

During the whole of our tedious return journey he made only one remark which showed that the matter was still in his mind. It was when we were in the train running London-wards.

"There are failures," he said, "which are infinitely more satisfying than success."

On the mantelshelf at Osnaburg Street a telegram awaited us. It was from Janet, handed in at Chester at 9 a.m. the previous day:

"Just come to me. Of course she was married to him. Glory."

Tubby grinned.

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE ♣

"You will bear witness that I announced the fact fully twelve hours earlier," he said.

And that, so far as we were concerned, was the end of the affair.

It has been Tubby's pleasure always to write it down amongst the few investigations with which he failed to deal successfully, but to me it has seemed far otherwise. Rather I see in it, more perhaps than in any other single case, the evidence of that all too uncommon quality to which Lord Mulhaven referred.

Of the other actors in the little drama there remains a little more to tell. Lord Mulhaven, preserving to the end the lie by which he kept unstained that particular page of the family history, died a few months later, according to the papers, at his place in Perthshire. Lady Mulhaven, they added, who had been in poor health since the death of her little son, and much shaken by this second loss, purposed a sea voyage and a visit to her South African friends.

Tubby had grunted when he read it.

"To the aristocracy," he said, "all things are possible."

Later still came the announcement of her second marriage and her return to England with her second husband and their small adopted son.

There was a matter-of-fact simplicity about Peter Brown's narrative manner that succeeded, before he had got very far with his story, in driving from the minds of his listeners the uncanny presences of the darkling garden. As his

THE AFFAIR OF THE MULHAVEN BABY ♣

voice ceased, however, the influence of the normal wavered and began again to fade. The shadow of the house had reached across the terrace and crooked an ugly finger towards the middle of the lawn. The moon was sinking fast. A little breeze fluttered invisible leaves. The window lights were mere stencils on the darkness.

"I'm rather glad you told your yesterday's story yesterday, Mr. Spencer," said Mrs. Dane-Vereker. "I shouldn't fancy it at all just now."

The only comment came from the poet:

"You hear voices now that it is dark and cool. I hear them always, everywhere."

The Lady of Fashion was surprised into her normal artificiality.

"How tiresome for you, Mr. Herrick! Are you a medium?"

The poet stared seriously into space.

"Voices that say strange things and in strange places. That is why my poems are often both fantasy and commonplace, for they are drawn from behind the veil of daily life."

"Bogies and buses," suggested Peter Brown cheerfully.

The poet, unexpected as ever, laughed unaffectedly.

"More or less," he said.

"Have you a sample, Mr. Herrick?" asked the Woman Doctor.

"Lots," replied the poet, drawing an untidy roll of paper from his pocket. He was sitting within the light-radius of one of the *salon* windows, and his profile was all the more visible for the

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S SECOND TALE ♣

dense gloom of its background. He seemed excited and vehement, a different being from the shy, silent creature of the day-time.

"Read us one," said the Priest kindly.

Mr. Buck groaned.

"Make it an easy one, young feller. I've no 'ead for potery."

The poet rustled his papers, bending an untidy head over the tangle of manuscript. Suddenly he appeared to make up his mind, and, rising from his chair, walked nearer to the light. In his hand were several quarto sheets; strewn on the ground lay the rejected portions of the bundle. With no preliminary word he threw back his head and began

THE POET'S TALE.

THE VASE

THE poet felt the heat was sad,
August the saddest month—he had
not written for so long. Tired sets
of little men in bowler hats
were all the force the street could find
as expression for its eager mind
to which Life was nothing, the dead were all.
In every loggia, down every wall,
by every window, every gate,
compact and sluggish airs did wait
as the poet passed, then furtively
followed his wanderings, till he
could swear the city's dead were these—
to gradual personalities
resolving in his fancy till
they scarcely seemed invisible,
but every one he came upon
clear as its place—folk young and wan
with irrecoverable excess,
and—for what end he could not guess—
bent on abstracting life from those
who, though alive, were comatose
more than themselves. And thus they'd wait,
ineffectual, desolate,

THE POET'S TALE

too weak to waste or waken Man.
The sky was harder and wearier than
surly skies that cry. By day
the town way was a weary way.
It grew so hot, so hot it grew
he could do nothing all night through
but sit on the balcony that went
all round the house ; thus indolent
he watched the empty court below,
the empty windows, row on row,
the cloudless sky of empty stars.
He knew no other travellers
in the little town. He cursed his stay
and the stifling train, the only way
of escape to other ground that would
be no more likely to bring the mood
of work. By an oleander bush
he sat, some way from his room ; the hush
of stars and bricks abruptly broke.
In the room behind him someone spoke :

THE CHURCH

" Push it near me, that vase of bracken.
The days we spend here drowse and darken
in such deathly uniformity
that nothing breaks in light on me
but that. It recalls a dream I had
years past, of a haunted church decayed
on a bracken cliff, the very last
of a sea-swept town. And I was vast
and seeing and universal so
that I could pierce the walls and know

THE VASE 🐉

what the sea held—a will to touch
all that entered the haunted church
with madness, so that each thought him dead
and turned to a ghost. A hatred hid
through the drowned streets of all who should
know their lost church. The bracken stood,
green like this in our vase, with gorse,
round the ruin and down the moors.

I saw the deepest crypt laid bare,
and something quiet was sitting there,
with little round things. Down I stared,
it was rusty-filmed and reddish-haired.
I could not understand at first
until I had bent low and pressed
close ; and it was a fleshless head
with hair still clinging, long and red,
a miser who to hide his gold,
his small round bags, had forced the old
crypt. When the magic came he mourned
his wealthy hopes thus overturned,
and starved and swooned, and rats and mice
gnawed his nails and lids and eyes,
and damp and teeth soon had him stripped.
The sovereigns tumbled as they nipped
his bags and mocked him in the crypt.

The lovers came by night to tryst,
and felt the bitter glaucous mist
eat through their ribs ere they had kissed,
and thought their chance of flight was gone,
then sank in sobs upon the stone,

THE POET'S TALE

each blaming the other for the choice
of such a deathly trysting-place.
The miasma rose in waves and reeled
and rocked above the forms it killed,
as though the sea were sent in search
by the vanished town for its coveted church.

I saw a poet come to find
if this strange place could stir his mind
to write again ; he brought his friend
the archæologist. ' Who'ld mend
this place and strengthen the cliff would do
the land a service,' said the two.
' The door has gone.' ' But the roof has held.'
Inside the enchanted blackness quelled
both before they had even descried
the lovers dead and side by side.
Then thus the archæologist :
' What I have missed ! What I have missed !
My book that I was making great !'
He was no astounding poet, but straight
his answer came : ' But this is more
than all the things we did before.
My work was done in that life, though
I wouldn't realise it was so.
And now it's as though we flew—the air
has lifting ripples everywhere—
and if they gave me flight, then I'd
have rhymes for every cloud,' he cried ;
' I will not go to the weary moor,
but stay in what found me such a store
of rising wonder. It must be
that there's more here than I can see,

THE VASE

and very soon my spirit's eyes
will see long ocean-routes and skies
leading out wide, but not to the moor.'
All day he waited for new power,
scorning his friend—at last began
to explore the church—towards the man
in the crypt he drifted—once again
I'd feel my horror through his brain
at what was underneath that hair,
I knew—and so it was. The stair
remounting : ' Shall I look like him ? '
he thought, and every shadow grim
he took for his own body. Faint
he grew with famine and dampness' scent.
' And what a failure I must be
if this is all death brings to me,
no help but one more death to find
a life more worthy hid behind
this wretchedness.' He hanged himself
upon the screen that cut in half
the church—below, the sea-washed streets
shook the breakers with laughing fits.

The gypsy dancer from the fair
strolled curiously in to stare,
and danced to keep away the fear.
And when her dancing-time was ended
and she fell also, terror-wounded,
her spirit rose and kept the dance
going along the aisle's expanse,
whisked by the cobwebs, blown by the bats,
the breeze's eddies and pirouettes
whistled her up and down the aisle,

THE POET'S TALE ♣

many a cramped persistent smile,
flittering round where the stalls had been
until she reached the great rood-screen,
then sprang aloft, and up and down,
her hair flew out, she tattered her gown.
' If they could see me now ! ' she said,
' that am wasting all this feather-tread
on wood and bats and darkness—then
there'd be no hard-boxed ears again,
and no meals missed, because, poor me,
I wasn't worth my keep,' said she.
From side to side, all rays of hair
and streaming rags, she frolicked there,
like a great spider spread and dangled
just over where the poet strangled.

They were a motley crew to see !
And then I realised suddenly
that watching all that silly throng
I had stayed long, so far too long
that I, like all the rest, was dead—
I woke with fright and sprang from bed."

" Think of another dream." " You must
bring me more flowers, then." In haste
the listener sped to his room and turned
the stranger's dream he had just learned
to verse ; and as he wrote, a whim
of fitful power came back to him,
as though a wave from some far sea
rose, lapped him, sank capriciously,

THE VASE

and he in a sacred fury wrote
that song might call more breakers out.

Roused by this happening, all next day
he walked the town. They kept away,
those other travellers. Only the dead,
disquieted and dispirited,
at every corner warmed his path
with an oozy and enervating breath.
The peasants came in heavy-eyed
from the parched and difficult country-side.
The little men in bowlers bought
coffee to try and stir a thought.
The shops were full of foolishness,
remains from the big town's taste in dress,
and flowers with squeezed and clammy stalks.
Only some rushes brought to his walks
a freshness. These he bought, still bent
on recapturing those waves—they sent
a sudden drench of breathless sport,
midsummer madness. Current-caught
he crossed the balcony. Empty lay
the room and tawdry to the day.
He pushed the door and filled the vase,
and smoked in his accustomed place
when night set in. On the stroke of ten
he heard folk enter and talk :

“ Again
they've put some favourite leaves of mine.”
“ We want a story, another fine
hour like last night's.”

THE POET'S TALE

THE BARGE

“When rushes shine
so wetly, I see a garden, straight
and sloped to a river-bank, with great
yew-hedges shutting it off from all
but the river. Rushes damped recall
my first sight of the place. There came
something sailing down the stream.
A painted barge, all diamonded, cubed,
sprigged with laurels and roses, daubed
with landscapes on the cabin-doors,
blue rivers in bright yellow shores,
rose-patterned cans and mugs and barrels,
and suns and roses, moons and laurels
on rudder and prow. A chimney hung
with paper roses. The brass-work swung
tunes on the horse. A wonderful crone
called to the horse and steered alone,
her face with a thousand wrinkles, tanned
and framed in a black sun-bonnet, and
a dress of stripes. By her a small
girl, the most wonderful thing of all,
dark, with the curliest hair that ever
grew since boats first sailed a river,
sat on the cabin thinking. Long
after they passed I dreamed among
the hedges about her, and I tried
night-dreams as well—unsatisfied
by night, my days all went to hitch
together tales. A powerful witch
the old woman grew to be, and they
sailed away and sailed away

THE VASE 🐉

to their magic flower-garden. Here
the child grew goat-legs such as were
on the curly-headed thing I knew
from the bed-room print, and vanished through
the trees. I watched so patiently
if she would sail again to me,
all through that month. At eight years old
a month is centuries untold !
But she came no longer down the river.
I called her Topsy, as I never
knew her real name."

The poet wrote,
his course made clear beyond all doubt,
one story more, and then in sleep
all night he felt the breakers creep
nearer. Soon all that dancing sea
would be accessible. Waking, he
believed the summer held content.
About the corridors he went
until he caught a glimpse of three
people across the balcony,
A young man, dark and stout, a young
woman, and one much older, strong
and dark, in black, and rather grim.
They went directly on seeing him.
But not before their voices' sound
showed that the one who nightly found
such tales to tell the rest must be
the girl ; she turned most suddenly.

THE POET'S TALE

The inn grew dull. He tried the town.
The sun shone pitilessly down.
He saw the works of most renown.
From the pushing dead and their complaints
he entered churches where the saints
on burnished horizons drooped and wilted,
teary and white like candles melted.
And Herod's soldiers leper-white,
with eyes diseased and pushed outright
from sockets, whitely pupilled, eared
with the scaly flaps of leprosy, skewered
the Innocents and flung in heaps
like whitey maggots, under deeps
of red-hot gilded sky.

No trace
of hope for a poet in such a place.
The day was dead, the night alive.
And every act of his should strive
to keep it. For him no lilies white
and melting, or violets sticking tight.
He bought a mossy potted plant,
most like to what the vase might want.

That night the young man's voice began
the conversation, just as ten
rang from the bells. "Aha," said he,
"The chambermaid's too fond of me,
and trims the table with new flowers
as often as the day has hours.
Poor girl, I thought it was going so!"
"Listen to Walter!" "Didn't you know? . . .
Let's hear what this recalls to you."

THE WATCHMAKER

"The tall watchmaker that I knew,
 he was so odd, there can be few
 like him. You shall not show me those
 small lycopodiums but my nose
 turns at a smell of sickly heat
 sliming out to a high black street,
 and I see them, choking for repotting,
 like rags of duckweed, dripping, rotting,
 squashing their leaves on a window, squeezed
 'mid clocks all garlanded and friezed
 and cogs and a case I wanted most
 of any sight—the bell, the ghost !
 The work of a life, the wonderful toy !
 On a five-bar gate there straddled a boy
 watching a grey stone church, a tree
 with foliage crumpled carefully
 like varnished sponge, and paths and grass.
 Each minute's end there came to pass
 the most miraculous things—the gate
 swung, and the boy he waved his hat—
 a bell rang—in the tower one saw
 the sexton dimly—never awe
 was quite so nice as when the end
 came with a tomb shot back to send
 a skeleton out with jerking glass
 of sand—my one desire was
 to grow enough to see inside
 the grave for the coffin it would hide
 as I felt sure.

THE POET'S TALE

He might have been
another John the Baptist in
that hush which all the coughs and clicks
of watches could not stir. White cheeks,
black beard, and soft protruding lip.
He talked of God, while flip ! and flip !
spun on the counter a little wheel,
sure as the ghost ; a torpid eel
curled vague beneath it in a tank
of water nebulous green that stank
of machines and illness like the air,
unchanged ten years, and cleansed, he'd swear,
by the wheel alone ; the eel could have
only the smallest space to move.
And to the wheel's soft sticky flips
he spoke of the dread Apocalypse,
the sacred books, and men's mistakes,
and warning dreams, the soul that wakes
half-warned to live still more debased.
Grandmother listened, I grew dazed.
The gloom was full of brushing wings
of holy, nameless, lawless things.
The air was mossy, the air was damped.
I thought how the eel lay sodden and cramped.

And every time I wondered more,
and most the time they sent me for
Grandmother's pansy-painted watch.
The shop was empty, but I could catch
a laughing sound from the room beyond—
it seemed an unbelievable sound
in such a place—I stole across
to the glass partition, and it was

THE VASE

from him—he sat there laughing, laughing,
dithering his boots together, curving,
rocking, strangling, beating his thighs—
he looked all white wet teeth and eyes—
as though the laughter could not come
enough, as though his flesh were dumb
and cold to the griping cry within
for laughter, dragged with choke and grin—
as though the feet of laughs raced up
his throat and crowded and hammered to ope
his windpipe for one victor-cry
as when the north-winds satisfy
rapidity-lusts by wrestling through
tree-trunks to send them raving to
earth with a last report—as though
all cause for laughter ever since
the devil first had laughed at sins
and angels first had laughed at him
stood there by laughter's crowning whim.
Was it another more wonderful toy ?
He took no notice, I peered—dismay
stabbed me—the room was empty quite—
then, bending in my frightened sight,
he clutched his knees and crouched and rose,
ran for the wall—then round he goes,
a grinning stampede, five times—a stop,
clapping the wall as if to grope
for hold on its flatness, and straight to me,
kicking his feet ridiculously,
gnawing the air and wheeling arms
faster and rougher, still he comes
with forefingers pointing stiff, then altered
their motion, gazed above, and faltered

THE POET'S TALE

and made corrections, waved with care,
as though he'd sign the unwilling air
in meaning traces—a shivering whirl
and he snatched towards the chair to hurl
and missed his grasp, reeled stamping round
laughing maliciously at the ground,
and as he drifted a sudden wrench
clawed his spine back—I saw him blanch,
bent to a frightful horse's shoe,
then swing upright, plunge headlong through
the door behind—and home I ran
and dared not tell them what the man
was like, but cried and said no word.
They only thought me cross, and heard
nothing till news spread through the town
of how his business all went down,
and so he took fierce drugs and died,
leaving a heavy country-side
where no one dared be odd or new,
and types like his were all too few,
the tall watchmaker that I knew."

The innkeeper could hardly tell
the poet much. Unsociable,
that lady and her young people—they
might be her children. None could say.
They never left their rooms by day.
Too hot. They sometimes took a stroll
at night, returning punctual
by ten.

Now for those flowers alone
he went to the streets, the overblown

THE VASE 🍀

damp roses scorning still, and all
the florist's sick material
unsapped, and bought wild willow-herb
of a country-woman on the curb,
and acted his scheme, as ever bold ;
and this the tale the young girl told :

THE BUST

“ The willow-herb lit garishly
with its hard cerise a shadowy
room where all else was black—each chair
and sofa blackened with horse-hair,
and black the marks around her eyes,
the little lady who crumpled lies
with soft black hair and cross of jet,
watching me closely. I see her yet—
her eyes are large and yellow. Crêpe
her dress. No manner of escape
from sombreness but the flowers' glare.
And I am reading to her there
books of a stiffer, smoother gloom
than any black thing in her room.
Fat mournful virgins smiled and wept
and smiled on every page. I kept
reading for hours. The servant old
made all the noise the house did hold
gently a-creep below. And one
more thing was smiling, looking on,
the young and ancient smile that mocked
these new devotions interlocked
of tears with smiles. A marble mouth

THE POET'S TALE ●

breathing a foreign influence forth
through all the room. A woman's head
from early Greece. When we had read
right through the book, the lady told
of its discovery, in that old
bedroom, a century before—
they noticed from the exterior
a window unaccounted for.
They tapped and worried the walls, removed
paper and found a door which proved
the entrance to that room. The chair
in which I sat was standing there,
the table now trimmed with willow-herb,
and high on a shelf, piercing, superb
in secrets, chaining their eyes, the Greek.
Nor could they ever find whose freak
imprisoned her there. She stayed on, wise,
pointing her chin and narrowing her eyes,
grown to an heirloom, the lady said.
She did not like her. The unmoved dread
knowledge of gods would match but ill
with her virgins. 'Nothing I know can fill
my dreams like that,' she said : 'It grows
so small that I grope for hours in close
black cellars or rustling garrets for
it lost in the cracks upon the floor—
or else I walk a corridor,
lengthy and dark, and know the end
will be a sudden gasping bend
where I shall see it swollen to such
a size that as it falls I'll crouch
knowing it for my death. If ever
I turn that corner in a fever

THE VASE

or nightmare I'll be really dead.
The fright will kill me, I think,' she said."

But now the listener had planned
such wonderful things, such lyrics and
fantastic plays, that each slight word
darkness-lapped and overheard
to the smell of oleanders, with
nothing alive above, beneath
but that, had power to set alight
a train of thought that through the night
snatched it and gathered speed and flew
down paths her stories never knew—
ideas flamed by, so many, some
were lost in the whirling—lights did loom
ahead of plans abandoned long
ago for lack of power, his song
should reach and use. The walls arose
empty but in respect for those,
hushed, self-effacing, and the night
in sympathy divined his might
and caught her breath and clogged the town
with dulness to help his travail on—
he wrote, slept, woke in these thoughts alone.

And his mouth was wet with wine-sweet foam,
his feet were set in a silting from
a retreating, dragging tide, a sea
stretching to immortality,
beckoning to young sails to follow
and explore each cave and haunted hollow,

THE POET'S TALE

and dare to stare at wrecks below,
and clamber the cliffs, alone who know
the clouds of godhead, from their tops
piled to the high Olympus slopes.

"A few more days and I'll be great,"
and off he set for the certain bait
for verse.

At once in the streets that were
ridiculous linked with modern gear,
the ascendancy of the dead began.
They elbowed every little man
to nothingness. And through his head
ran thoughts as mutterings from the dead :
"In our time one saw caps of red,
not bowler hats. And scaffoldings
for frescoes. Shoes were coloured things.
His casual morning's work might be
the poor man's share in history,
spreading pomegranates on a stall
that painters bought as wherewithal
for their saints to make the Christ-child laugh.
Driving the little queer-eyed calf
the poet wrote of. Cutting wood
for the headsman's stage. Too late. You should
have come here then. All work is done,
there is nothing beneath this molten sun,
in this din of modern life, but vain
regrets to scorch and sear the brain."

The woman of the willow-herb
to-day had blue-veined vetch to curb
the evil dead. This amulet
exultant in the vase he set.

THE VASE

"Everything's different since we found this way to make the clock go round," came the man's voice. The old woman : "Yes, the rooms have lost their shadowiness."

THE TOWER

"The vetch was in flower. Each willow shed a great black star from its branches spread over the water's dark-green sky where half-moons swelled continuously by the bank, thin scalloped scimitars of moons as a rat regained his lairs. The kingfisher came. The vetch was in flower. We came in sight of a ruined tower, with four great figures the corners on, Matthew and Mark and Luke and John. I thought them alive and called aloud and was laughed at. Huge they stood and showed from very far. They knew remote things and all near. We stopped the boat, and drifted with scarce the will to stretch over the sides to pick the vetch. The ruin was not safe, but one of my best day-dreams was begun at once, of finding the turret-stair and climbing alone to see them near, and finding what they watched. Perhaps through secret inviolable gaps, clefts in the winds, a far-away lawn with the goat-child still at play—I wonder if it fell or they still watch, and whom this minute they see along the river instead of me ?

THE POET'S TALE ●

Who wants them more than I there's none,
mine only, whoever they look upon,
Matthew and Mark and Luke and John."

Next day the weather broke. All day
under the storm the country lay ;
the air blinked white and stabbed steel-blue.
At evening the poet started through
the streets for flowers. Too late—not one
florist was open in all the town.
The paving glimmered. The air came cool.
The streets showed not a single soul,
so empty and still and clean they lay
as even the dead were washed away.
He was loitering back, when a distant light
twinkled down through the coming night.
It proved but a little milliner's shop
whose shutters were not yet put up ;
he had turned away, when the window caught
his eye, all black silk flowers. He thought
of a change, that something amusing ought
to come from this whim, and paid in haste,
opened the balcony door, and placed
the ridiculous flowers in the vase ; again
he waited and heard them enter, when
the man's voice started : " Now we'll see
what my chambermaid has found," said he,
" for to-night's diversion—what in the world
is this ? Black flowers," he laughed, " such old
rags that they might have trimmed the dress
or bonnet of some old woman ! "

“ Yes.

I noticed that the old servant wore
that afternoon just such a poor
little old trimming—what a look
of fright she gave us as she took
her way upstairs and passed us. Do
you know what they make me think of too ?
That everything which came before
to my life was like a living flower,
now it's all grown unreal and black ;
yes, every hour has agreed to take
on darkness, every sight—that red
turned black as it soaked the rug,” she said ;
“ my husband, white in life, lay flushed
dark with rage, tho' his blood outrushed
so fast. And he was fair, and you
so dark, and blackening daily through
this heat, and all our rooms have been
black with curtain and furtive screen.”

“ Now there you are wrong, quite wrong. If I
composed a bouquet to typify
what happens to us next, I'd choose
such colour as the Tropics use
on their rankest leafage—such as flames
on lilies with fevered spotted stems.
The fiery-magenta icy-grey
agrostemma, the great one-day
poppies, the cruel, velvet, red
geranium, should be what Europe bred
for me. I'd ransack half the East,
then to Hawaian banks thick-fleeced

THE POET'S TALE ♣

with all curled growths of overmuch
luxuriancy, and all such
as not content with fragrance swell
to berries that ooze a bleeding smell,
and like a fabled prince would cross
the world for a single flower. No moss
in the most fœtid caves, no star
on virgin heights, no fruits that are
least known, and strange to achieve, should miss
our bouquet's emblemed ecstasies.
Yes, it would be magnificent,
and you, who had fathomed what it meant,
should admire it most, the gold and red,
always dying, never dead.
And we would go far off together,
still anxious and still fresh, to gather
in all of rarest dyes and juices,
acrid and sweet should both have uses
for us, from sweet to deeper sweet,
making my symbol more complete."

The poet rushed out into the street.

A gentle snore from the Master-Printer was the first audible comment.

"You've finished Buck, anyway!" giggled Peter Brown.

"I like your poem—very much, Herrick," said the Bureaucrat. He was a little august, but the stateliness of tone betokened shyness rather than intention. He wished to apologise indirectly to the poet for any aloofness in his attitude earlier

THE VASE

in the day. Also he felt obscurely that the remark about diplomats had squared the hostility account.

"The art of poetry among ancient peoples——" began the Professor.

"MacWhirter! You absent yourself all day, and when you return you orate. I am ashamed of you!"

The Professor smiled whimsically.

"Shame, my dear Scott, is relative. The ancients——"

"Damn the ancients!" cried the Psychical Researcher impatiently. "It is your turn for a story. Is it not the Professor's turn?" He appealed to the company.

"Professor! Professor!" chorused Spencer and Brown.

"Surely these researches in the library to-day can produce one little story, Professor?" said Dr. Pennock.

"Really—er—really——" began the learned man.

"Professor! Professor! Professor!" The cry was taken up once more. "The Professor's tale!"

THE PROFESSOR'S SECOND TALE!

The Professor, thus provoked, began in an archaic and flowery style the following recital:

“ONCE UPON A TIME”

IN the end of the fourth century of our era, a certain wealthy gentleman of Auvergne, —whose name is neither here nor there, and as in any case I no longer retain it, I shall, at such times as I shall have occasion, refer to him as Mr. Smith—sought in marriage a maiden of like degree, plighted his troth and fixed the marriage-day. It is to be said that both Mr. Smith and his intended bride were only children. When the day came and the nuptials had been celebrated, they were laid together in a bed, as custom was. But the maiden, in heavy sorrow, turned her face to the wall and lay weeping bitterly. Said he to her: Why art distressed? I pray thee tell me; and when she was dumb, added: I adjure thee by Jesus Christ, Son of God, to set out reasonably to me why thou grieveest. Thereon she turned to him and said:

Though I lamented all the days of my life, my tears would not suffice to wash away the measureless sorrow in my heart. I had resolved to preserve this my body for Christ, unspotted by the touch of men, but woe is me that am so deserted

"ONCE UPON A TIME" ●

of Him, that I could not perform my desire, and have lost this day, which would I had never seen, that which I have guarded all my life. Behold I am deserted by immortal Christ, who promised me paradise to my dower, and have got instead wedlock with a mortal man. In place of roses that cannot fade, these withering roses disfigure, not adorn, me. I, that should have put on the garment of purity by the four streams of the Lamb, now am burdened by the splendour of this bridal garb. But what use in all these words? Unhappy me, that should have won heaven, to-day I shall be plunged in the abyss. Oh, if this was my destiny, why was not the first day of my life likewise the last? Oh, would I had entered through the portal of death before I had sucked the breast! Oh, would that my dear nurse's kisses had been lavished on my corpse! I am filled with loathing at all beings on the earth, for I look upon the hands of the Redeemer transfixed that the world might live. I see not diadems flashing with splendid gems when in my mind I gaze with wonder on that thorny crown. I spurn thy broad lands, since I thirst for the loveliness of Paradise. I loathe thy terraces, when I look up and see the Lord sitting above the stars.

She sobbed out all this with bitter tears, and the young Mr. Smith, moved by kindness, said : Our parents, the bluest blood in Auvergne, had no children but us and were fain to wed us, that our families might be continued and no stranger inherit when they died.

THE PROFESSOR'S SECOND TALE

But she replied : The earth is naught, riches are naught, the pomp of this world is naught, naught is our very life itself. Nay, we must seek that life that death ends not, wherein man dwells in eternal blessedness and, enjoying in perpetual contemplation the presence of God Himself, changed to angelic state, knows the delight of imperishable gladness. To this he answered : At thy sweet discourse eternal life has shone upon me like a broad ray of light ; wherefore, if thou art fain to abstain from desire after the flesh, I will share thy design. And she replied : Hard it is for men to do that for women. Yet if thou seest to it that we be unstained in this life, I will give thee a lot in the dowry promised me by my Betrothed and Master Jesus Christ, to whom I have vowed myself slave and betrothed. Then he, armed with the standard of the Cross, said : I will do thy behest. And shaking hands on it they went to sleep, lying for many years in the same bed but with admirable chastity, as was afterwards made manifest.

For the maid, her struggles over, passed away to Christ. Her husband prepared her grave, and set the body on a bier ready for burial. And as he made to put her in the earth, raising his hands to heaven, he said : Lord Jesus Christ, I thank Thee that I return to Thy love this Thy treasure, intact even as Thou gavest it into my hand.

Whereupon lo ! the dead smiled and said : Why do you tell what you are not asked—er—Mr. Smith ?

"ONCE UPON A TIME"

The Professor sat lost for a few minutes in contemplation of this admirable *conte*. Then :

"I now remember," he said, "a pendant to this singular case of breaking silence, related by the same author, about Bricius, successor to the Blessed Martin."

Bricius, though proud and haughty, was revered by reason of his chastity. But in the thirty-third year of his ordination it happened that the woman to whom his valet de chambre's shirts were sent to wash, and who had taken the veil, conceived and bore a child. Bricius's flock rose in great anger and were eager to stone him, saying :

"Your affected saintliness has long concealed your profligacy. God no longer allows us to be polluted by kissing your unworthy hands."

The Bishop denied the accusation stoutly and called for the child, which was now thirty days old. It was brought, and, on the Bishop's adjuring it in Christ's name to say publicly if he had begotten it, replied :

"You are not my father."

The townsmen, nevertheless, since the child refused its actual father's name, ascribed this feat to the Bishop's magic arts and drove him out of the city.

For a moment no one spoke. Then :

"Oh," said the Bureaucrat, "so Learning does sometimes take a day off with the moderns ! It surprises me, Professor, that you should attend

THE PROFESSOR'S SECOND TALE

to anything so recent as the works of Anatole France."

"Anatole France?" repeated the Professor with an air polite but mystified, like one having just received an oracle.

"Yes," replied the Bureaucrat with a slightly tart impatience, for his bureaucratic mind resented both the indecision of the Professor's manner and the suspicion that something was being withheld from the public. Besides, he was not sure that he did not feel a slight twitch at his leg. "Yes, you got that first story out of *L'étui de nacre*."

"You will find it in the first book of the History of the Franks, written in the sixth century of our era by George Florence, called Gregory, Bishop of Tours," returned the Professor gravely. And added: "It is also mentioned in the twenty-second chapter of his book *De Gloria Confessorum*."

"Bishop?" said the Lady of Fashion with a demure look.

"Bishop," repeated the Professor

"It is getting late," said the Courier, "and I suggest we ask Dr. Pennock and Mr. Spencer for their stories without more delay. Otherwise, we may all be as Mr. Buck and an uncritical audience."

The Master-Printer slept happily on.

"Well, I shall be short and sweet and rather sentimental," said the Bureaucrat.

"And I not very short and very sad and rather

"ONCE UPON A TIME" ♣

bitter," said the Woman Doctor. "But the events are strikingly dramatic, and I think they will interest you."

"Let Mr. Spencer send us to bed soothed. Please begin, Dr. Pennock," Mrs. Dane-Vereker smiled appealingly. "Please tell us

THE WOMAN DOCTOR'S SECOND TALE."

A PLAYER PERFORCE

IS as good a title as any (began Dr. Pennock) for a story the figures and incidents of which keep an odd sharpness in my mind. That may be because of their association with one man—my friend for many years. I cannot tell it to you except crudely—as it happened. Life and death may come again to the stark crudity that was their aspect once in Athens, but it will be with a difference. For the Grecian the sun shone full on crude life; the borrowed radiance charmed him and, filled with regret for its swift passing, he dreamed for life a subtlety it had not.

Several years ago—it must be nearly ten—I was taking a holiday in Kent, a walking holiday with a knapsack eked out by a train-sent suitcase. One day, going along a country road, I found a broken-down car at the roadside. Motors were in their early and very undependable days. A breakdown was not in itself a novelty, but in idle curiosity I stopped to see what was happening. The owner of the car turned out to be a friend of my student years, Charles Dorn. He was M.O. of a large camp in the neighbourhood, and

A PLAYER PERFORCE ♣

living in a bungalow outside the village. His wife, he said, was bored. They had taken the place furnished, and the furniture was detestable, but if I would stay with them one night . . . ? My plans were quite elastic. I was pleased to meet Charles again and inclined to make the acquaintance of his wife. So I accepted the invitation and stayed. Mrs. Dorn turned out to be a clever and a charming woman, some years younger than her husband. Watching her, I saw that she was irritated by just those qualities in him that had always irritated me. Charles Dorn had not a vestige of that dignity to which we owe our bare escape from the intolerably ridiculous. But he was an amazingly clever doctor.

I did not intend to enter upon a sketch of this man's character. It is not necessary to the story.

Charles dined in Mess and came home some time after midnight. Less than four hours later, the household was wakened by a hammering on the door. "The Major says will you come at once, sir. Captain Barnes is dead." I heard Charles's voice—"My God, Jim Barnes! . . . My boots, damn it, my boots!"

He went, and returned just as we finished breakfast. To his wife's questions he made very short reply. Yes, the boy is dead. Killed himself. When she had gone, he turned to me—"You can't go to-day, Mary," he said. "The girl he was going to marry is coming down this afternoon. He told me so yesterday. We've searched among his letters, but we can't find any address. There's only one or two letters. No

THE WOMAN DOCTOR'S SECOND TALE

way of getting at her to stop her. She's got to be met and told. It's my job, of course, but you could do it so much better. I told the Major you'd tell her." He walked restlessly about the small room.

"There's something in the whole thing that I don't understand. And you've no idea what a fine kid he was." His face twisted and tears were in his eyes. I had even at that moment a flicker of contempt for his lack of control.

"Will you let me tell you about it? You'd better know. When I got up there this morning, they'd not even got a proper light in his hut and it was still half dark. Someone had stuck a candle on the dressing-table. His batman was sick and inclined to be hysterical. For the matter of that, the C.O. himself was more or less off his head. He was shouting at Macgregor to give some general order, and the next moment shouting at him to do something entirely different. I'd a look at Jim and then I questioned Murphy, his batman. The fellow had brought a cup of tea. The hut was dark, and Jim never answered when the man spoke to him. Murphy fumbled about on the table for Jim's candle and lit it. There was nothing on the bed but a tunic and Jim's belt. In the shadow at the foot of the bed was something white. Murphy approached it in a vague sort of way, and flashed the light on Jim—crouching stark naked there on the floor, with a yellow Cavalier wig half on his head and half over the twisted, swollen face."

Charles stopped in front of me. "Do you

A PLAYER PERFORCE

know, Mary, they'd not even lifted him on to the bed. And the only man there with any sense left in him was Pope, the one-armed equipment officer. He helped me a bit. There was a rubber bandage twisted tight round Jim's neck—a bandage he'd been wearing on his knee for the last week or so. He was strangled. It really was rather horrible, because of the wig. All but one or two of the boys had been gloriously blind the night before, and their nerves were shaky. There didn't seem any sense in it—just a kind of obscene jest. You see, the night before had been a great night for Jim. It was his first night as Mess President. And he'd just been put in charge of entertainments for the whole district. Things like that meant a lot to Jim. He was wild with excitement. When I met him about the camp yesterday he was almost incoherent. He'd had a wire to say the girl was driving over to see him. And he was fearfully keen on the entertainments business. He'd a passion for theatricals. The wig was one of the properties from our last show. And then at night he made a speech and the boys cheered him. He wasn't drunk. He was too excited to get drunk. It got damned hot in the Mess, and old Pope put his wooden arm through the window. He's an infantry officer, and went through South Africa. He insisted on telling us a long yarn of his company being ordered forward and then back again. On the way back they met a Brigadier who turned them round again. So they went back, and lay face downwards on the ground for a long time. Pope went to sleep, and

THE WOMAN DOCTOR'S SECOND TALE

when he woke up the man beside him wouldn't talk. Pope cursed him for an unsociable bounder, and continued his curses until he found the man was dead, shot through the temple. Then he cursed him for being dead. Afterwards they retreated again. Then the Adjutant told us of his exploits in alliance with an advertising man and a lift-boy from the Buckingham Palace Hotel. A Yankee journalist, who was our only guest, remarked with a thick solemnity that no one ought to blame England for the British Empire: it was so obviously an accident. There was nearly an international incident, but we smoothed it over, and the Yankee sang *God Save the King* with us. Afterwards he sang the *Stars and Stripes* by himself—no one else knew it. . . ."

"My dear Charles!" I said.

He began to laugh. "Forgive me, Mary. I was trying to prove to myself that it really is absurd. The dinner was all a dinner should be, and Jimmy made a perfectly good President. Why did he go away and play that filthy trick on us? . . . Perhaps I'd better go and dress. It's too cold for pyjamas and a Burberry."

While we waited in H.Q. hut for the girl, Charles evolved a theory. "Jim couldn't help acting, you know, Mary. I've known him for years. He never took his degree, but he ran the O.U.D.S. When he came down he wanted to act, but his parents—his mother in particular—hated the idea. I suppose it does seem a futile sort of ambition, but it wasn't nonsense for

A PLAYER PERFORCE

Jim: it was a fire in him. His father and mother became very ingenious in putting obstacles in the way of Jim's progress. His allowance was stopped, of course—but that was only one of the things they did. In the end Jim disappeared. He was away four or five months. Something happened during those months. He came back with all his defiance dried up and dead. They told him that he must begin at the bottom: you've heard of the Barnes Steel Works. He went into the works office as a clerk, but within a year the Boer War set him free. He enlisted right away: got badly wounded and was sent home to help train officers in England. Everywhere he went, if it could at all be managed, he got up concerts and things. Down at Bletchley he'd the most wonderful theatre—revolving stage and a kind of plaster of Paris sky with holes in it. On that little stage he'd got a starlight effect that took your breath. The men worked themselves silly for him. . . . Well, you know, Mary, I think he was acting last night. He was in a state of feverish excitement. As he undressed he caught sight of that wig and put it on; then stood staring at himself in the glass. Maybe he remembered that the girl was coming to-day, and the thought came into his head—'Suppose she had refused me!' He sees himself suddenly the rejected lover, and his face as he looks at it becomes an anguished mask. The rubber bandage is in his hand, and he begins to twist it round his neck. The despairing man is strangling himself. . . . You know how those rubber bandages

THE WOMAN DOCTOR'S SECOND TALE ●

hold. It gripped him like a vice. He fumbled at it, first in irritation and then anxiously. And then a mad tearing at it with the blood hammering in his temples and his throat an agony. Power to think at all has gone. He is strangling: he reels, and his hands cannot help him. . . ."

The Adjutant got violently to his feet. "There's a dogcart coming down the road. Lord knows I don't want to meet the girl, but it will be a pleasant relief from your imaginations."

It was the girl. The cart, a private vehicle, stopped opposite H.Q. hut. She climbed out, and stood looking round with a frown of bewilderment. Jim should have been waiting there. My heart failed me as I walked towards her. "My dear," I said, "there has been an accident. If you will come with me—— I am Dr. Pennock."

She stood quite still on the rough path, half-way between the hut and the road. I was ill at ease. She was not going to give us any help. She could not have been more than twenty years old, but she was self-possessed as a woman of forty, and as difficult to approach. It was going to be impossible to soften things for her.

Moving just a little stiffly, she followed me into the hut. Charles and the Adjutant had already gone. "Won't you sit down?" I asked her.

"I'd rather stand."

She stood there while I talked, her face quite impassive save for a contraction of the carefully darkened eyebrows. I told her as gently as I could, and I felt that she was contemptuously

A PLAYER PERFORCE ♣

aware of my hesitations. I find the modern girl rather difficult. She has so little tolerance. If I could have said—"Jim's dead, you know; awfully sorry, old thing"—I think she would have recognised a cue, and accepted me. But she let me go through the forms of speech that are in my tradition and made no concessions to my folly. They wearied her. When it was all told, she said abruptly, "Must I see him?" and before I could speak, added quickly—"I'd rather not."

"Then I certainly shouldn't," I answered.

There was nothing more for me to say, so I stood in silence. She was not beautiful, but her face had a certain charm of feature and colouring, deftly accentuated. It bore now an odd air of reflection. I felt that I had misinterpreted her silence. She was disconcerted—not mortally wounded. Then abruptly her face was that of a hurt child. She sat down, and began pulling off her long gloves. "Oh, poor Jim, poor Jim," she said softly. The tears fell on her hands, lying palm upwards in her lap. A half-smile curved her mouth. "You think me a rotter, don't you, doctor? But, you see, Jim didn't love me: I arranged for him to marry me. He would have been rich, and I must marry someone, you know. My mother will be annoyed when she hears."

Charles and the Adjutant returned awkwardly to the room. The girl's glance, passing carelessly over Charles, rested on the Adjutant with a gleam of interest. Behind Charles, his wife stood uncertainly. The girl was more at ease than any

THE WOMAN DOCTOR'S SECOND TALE

of us. "Could I stay until—for the funeral?" she asked.

"If you'd stay with me——" began Mrs. Charles.

The girl glanced up quickly, and for an instant they looked at each other as might natives of the same country meeting in a foreign land. "I'd love to stay: I could send a note home by the groom. It's very good of you." She followed Mrs. Charles out of the hut.

Captain Barnes's mother came later in the afternoon. They had wired her warning of an accident. I was driven to the station to meet her, and Charles came with me. We told her the boy was dead, and afterwards, when she had seen him, we told her the manner of his death. There would be an inquiry, and it could not be hidden. Charles entered amazingly upon the details of his theory. The mother heard him without emotion, and when he had talked himself silent, said, "He should have died in South Africa."

Charles was disconcerted. He gave her in silence the foolscap envelope bearing her name, found among the dead man's papers. She turned it over in her hands. "Is there anywhere here I could be alone?"

We took her to the bungalow and left her in the little sitting-room. An hour later Mrs. Charles, carrying in a cup of tea, found her folding up the papers and pushing them back into the envelope. "She wants to catch a train back to town. Will you order the cart? And, Charles,

A PLAYER PERFORCE ♣

dear, I think you might ask the Adjutant to dinner. He will amuse Miss Tarrant."

"I should hardly have thought Miss Tarrant wanted amusement——" her husband began.

His wife regarded him with a half-irritated mockery. "If you think the Adjutant will feel like that about it, you'd better not ask him," she observed.

Just before dinner the girl waylaid me in the passage. "Dr. Pennock," she said hastily, "Mrs. Barnes gave me the letter that Jim left for her." She paused, and seemed at a loss. "You'll think me silly," she went on, "but I don't want to read it. I'd almost rather look at Jim, and I don't want to do *that*. She's—malicious. She wouldn't have given it to me if it hadn't been somehow dreadful."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked. I was myself malicious enough to be enjoying the girl's awkwardness.

"Would you look at it? Oh, I know it's preposterous of me to ask you—a stranger. It's just that you *are* a stranger. It couldn't hurt you."

I took it from her. She turned away, with a swift mischievous glance at my averted face. "There might be a will somewhere in it, doctor. That shocks you, doesn't it?" I heard her laughing softly as she shut the door of her room.

I sat in my own room after dinner and read through the short manuscript. I was grateful for the dingy wallpaper and the bare floor. The ugly bedstead became a kindly and familiar thing.

THE WOMAN DOCTOR'S SECOND TALE

I got up once and touched it, just to rid myself of that other room. . . .

The letter was dated 1901, and had been written apparently some time after the outbreak of the war. For the most part it was a straightforward narrative told without passion of anger or regret.

"Only a whim took me down to Whitechapel that night. I was going to New York next day with Arthur Gavens' company. He saw me once at Oxford: it was only a small part he gave me, but I knew I'd be all right. You would have had a letter from Liverpool.

"Someone I met in the morning told me of a little East End theatre, and Gosthonyi, the old Jew who acted like a man possessed of the gods. The place was hard to find, and the performance nearly half over when I squeezed my way in. I suppose the audience was entirely Hebraic, but, oddly enough, the players were not mouthing Yiddish. I hate the speech of Jews. They were playing the *Ædipus Coloneus*, Englished by Gosthonyi himself. I was supremely uncomfortable and half suffocated, but I forgot all that. This old man was no stricken cheat of Fate. His mortality was his greatness: in omnipotence is no divinity. He waited tranquilly for the paltry gods to deal their last stroke.

"I persuaded myself that columned Athens was just beyond the pressing crowd. . . .

"The crowd was Grecian enough in all conscience: it smelled horribly of garlic.

"If you had ever seen Rachel Gosthonyi, you

A PLAYER PERFORCE ♣

would know better than I can tell you how wonderful Gosthonyi was. I had been in the theatre a quarter of an hour before I noticed her, except as a voice, one of the human voices murmuring round the feet of Death.

"Rachel, moving in the likeness of Antigone, was a thin white flame. Amazingly, her hair was red—red-gold, with metallic greens and purples in the hollows of its sculptured waves. It made her a barbaric cloak when she knelt before Œdipus.

"On my life I cannot say whether I stayed to see her beauty or the old man's terrible genius. As I made my way to the back of the stage, Rachel passed me on the narrow stairs. I forgot New York and Arthur Gavens. I stammered when I stood before the old man.

"'I am an actor,' I told him. 'I want to be a great actor. Will you let me join your company? I'd come as a stage hand to be able to watch you—and your wonderful daughter. I don't want money.'

"I think an obscure malice prompted his reply.

"'Come if you like,' he said. 'I dare say we can find you something to do.'

"Rachel hesitated in the doorway. He put his hand on her shoulder. 'My wife,' he said.

"The Gosthonyis lived in the lower half of an old house. I took a room as near them as I could—no, I didn't give my real name, your name.

"I went with them to their house after every performance. Old Gosthonyi could not sleep o' nights, and I sat in his bedroom until dawn. A

THE WOMAN DOCTOR'S SECOND TALE

big four-poster bed was pushed against the wall. He sat up in that and talked without pause. Some nights he acted for me. Shylock, trapped and impotent, cried shame upon my Gentile perfidy. Philoctetes turned from defiance to swift entreaty. The room was filled with a clamour of words—the wind singing in an empty place.

“Rachel sat facing me at the other side of the fireplace. My brain reeled at her nearness. Meeting her eyes fixed on mine, I shuddered violently. Always old Gosthonyi watched us, a sleepless Fate. After the long night, I went home and fell into troubled sleep, haunted even in my dreams by his watching eyes.

“He had a poor idea of women, and took a delight in telling me so. ‘There is no such thing as purity in woman,’ he said. ‘There are some stupid women, and some cowards. But women know nothing of purity, except to keep themselves physically untouched. They have no soul—only a wanton thought, suppressed or indulged. All clever women are wantons in spirit. Show me an intelligent woman, and I will show you a harlot in intent if not in deed. “Ere I would say I would drown myself for the love of a guinea-hen, I would change my humanity with a baboon.” Are you in love, boy? “A lust of the blood and a permission of the will.”’

“Rachel was a clever ‘cellist. She rarely played, because Gosthonyi did not like it. But once a Jewish child of three or four years ran in to speak to him. The whim seized him to see her dance. Rachel played, and the child, with

A PLAYER PERFORCE

bare rounded limbs, danced as fauns dance. The old satyr on the bed laughed and applauded. The scent of forests and the pungent smell of sacrificial meats filled the room. I walked with Rachel into the depths of the woods, past the fountain hung with votive gifts. She trembled in my arms.

"The music stopped—and there sat Gosthonyi, watching and smiling.

"Three months I lived this life, and then he fell ill. Now he never slept. Rachel and I took it in turns to sit with him. Sometimes I nodded in my chair by the fire and, waking with a start, found the sunken eyes fixed still on me.

"He grew too weak to speak. Three days he lay on his bed, keeping his monstrous guard. Then he passed from stupor to death, and throughout a whole day the hired mourners wept and tore their hair, while I slept in my own room, heavily, like a man escaped from an intolerable strain.

"Late in the evening I went back to the house, entering cautiously. Rachel sent away the mourners. She sat in her old place by the fire. Gosthonyi lay in the centre of the great bed. I had looked for him to be a little shrunken now that the divinity had left him. But he was like a man asleep.

"I stood between the bed and the fireplace. When she came to me, her fingers on my throat were tongues of flame, searing me. As I held her, my ebbing senses returned. I hurt her in my madness. When my hold loosened, she slipped from me and bent over the bed. For a moment

THE WOMAN DOCTOR'S SECOND TALE ♣

I did not understand what she was doing. Then I saw her pushing violently at the heavy body of Gosthonyi. She pushed him to the far side of the bed, with nervous, angry movements. Coming back to take my hand in hers—‘It is a big bed,’ she said softly. ‘Am I not beautiful?’

“I stood dizzily. Then I carried her towards the bed.

“Its chill weight had pressed on my neck for a full minute before I realised that the old man had flung an arm across me. The bed was shaken with his difficult laughter, and he was babbling of guinea-hens. . . .

“Rachel huddled on the edge of the bed, stricken, hidden in her hair, while I struggled with my boots. I got them on the wrong feet, and they were acutely uncomfortable. . . .

“Half-way down the Mile End Road, I thought that I ought to have stayed. I turned round and walked back. My boots hurt, but I knew that I had not time to put them right. Besides, one does not stop in the middle of the street to change boots.

“He was dead this time, with his lips curled back off his teeth, as your lips curl, my lady mother, when I talk of my acting. My mind played me an unpleasant trick, and for an instant you were lying there with your head flung back in malicious laughter. My being was wrenched violently from its secret places and tore itself apart in a sightless fury. . . .

“Of course, he could not have had the strength to choke her, though there were marks on her

A PLAYER PERFORCE

throat. She must have died of fright. I made her as straight as I could. I was very sorry for her.

"You know what I should have done. I should have made sure that my body did not leave that room. I might have cut off Rachel's hair and twisted it round my neck. That would have been an odd death and worthy a gutter tragedian. I think you would have winced.

"Do you remember the night I came home? You took the hurt child in your arms and soothed him. The resentment I cherished I put from my mind for ever. I was certainly mad to think that I cared more for acting than I do for you. I wake up sometimes from a dream that my madness broke your heart and you are laid with lips curled back, malice carved in the likeness of death. . . . What horror!

"One day you will perhaps have this, and know how much I really loved you."

I came back violently to the small room, and the sight of common, used things filled me with pleasure. I heard Miss Tarrant's voice, and wondered vaguely why the boy's mother had given her the letter. Blind malice? I do not know. Malice has so strange and secret a share in our emotions, prompting the thoughts and deeds of lovers. We are all enemies one of another.

I doubt, reading his terrible letter, whether the mother had any vision of the fight that love made with resentment in her son's mind. It must assuredly have been hidden even from him,

THE WOMAN DOCTOR'S SECOND TALE

a secret, devastating conflict. He would not recognise it for what it was when the violent excitement of that last evening jerked it to the surface. It must have masked itself in such a dramatic play as Charles imagined.

I do not profess to understand.

There was a sound of wheels outside the bungalow. I heard the girl's "good-night," and the Adjutant's low voice—"May I come to-morrow? You'd like to see me?" When I went out into the hall she was standing, apparently in thought, her hand on the bolt of the door.

"I've read the letter," I told her, "and with your permission, I should like to destroy it. It's not—pleasant."

She let me walk slowly down the passage to my room before she took a quick step forward. "Dr. Pennock—?"

"There wasn't anything in the nature of a will," I said triumphantly.

"Most interesting, most interesting," said Henry Scott emphatically. "Thank you a thousand times for telling so suggestive a tale. Did it ever occur to you that the mind of the young man——"

"Scott!" breathed the Professor, with a sort of disembodied roguery. "You are about to be technical. I am ashamed of you."

The Psychological Researcher laughed and apologised.

A PLAYER PERFORCE ♣

"I'm sorry," he said. "MacWhirter got me that time."

"I feel like some sweetness and sentiment," said Mrs. Dane-Vereker. "Also I'm getting sleepy."

"Here goes, then," said Spencer. "It is called either

THE BUREAUCRAT'S SECOND TALE, OR

SALVATOR STREET

A DIRTY little boy was exceedingly hungry on the Surrey side. If he had gone to school a thoughtful Government would have filled him with soup, and stew, and suet pudding : but he felt a desire to take the air and observe the manners of men : therefore his stomach was deprived of municipal comfort. He was pallid and unwashed ; his clothes failed to perform the duty of screening his person from public scrutiny, so it peeped out from many a rent, like grossly hilarious pink mouths. A wet October wind searched out each of these, so that the urchin shivered from time to time as he slouched out of the Walworth Road. His toes were anointed with mud, which squelched copiously through the cuts and seams in his boots. His face, overshadowed by an immense greasy cap (the cast-off property of his father, one of the more indolent citizens of Southwark), had collected a uniform veneer of grey grime ; but deeper hues might be traced in smears on his nose and neck.

After he was tired of exchanging obscene badinage with van-boys, undertakers, local ladies, and fried

SALVATOR STREET 🐾

fish vendors, he turned his attention to the merchandise in shop windows. The long survey of a grocer's shop brought home to him the fact of his acute hunger. Ignoring the violent printed exhortations to obtain our Blue Coupons, he revelled among the most gorgeous things to eat, planning for himself an unusually indigestible menu. There was a recess in one side of the doorway for the display of various goods, unprotected by glass. The passers-by might there be allured by the heads of bass brooms and yellow packets that contained decomposing gravel, apparently a popular form of nutriment at breakfast among the people of America. But right in the middle of all this were sundry slabs of remarkably cheap cake, in which sand seemed to play an important basic part. An hysteric "*Look!*" in crimson italics was not necessary to draw the small boy's attention to this mottled compound. He thought all the more unhappily of the exiguous bit of bread and "mixed fruit" jam which he had eaten with no great appetite because of the sickening stuffy room where his father slept off last night's potations, and his mother nourished an unhygienic baby. But the fresh air made him feel starved. This wealth of unprotected cake brought water to his mouth, and caused the most poignant sensations in his interior. There was nothing for it but to grab and run at the proper time.

Being of a strategical disposition, like most children who have been frequently beaten and have played under moving carts, he strolled to

THE BUREAUCRAT'S SECOND TALE ♣

the tobacconist's next door, until a favourable moment for attack might present itself. His plan was to follow some large person entering the shop and to abstract a portion of "Look!" when the doorway was thus effectively blocked. Opportunity soon sailed by in the form of a stout dame with shawl and basket, who looked admiringly at certain margarine advertisements, offering kitchen utensils in exchange for one hundred wrappers. She was about to enter: the small boy assumed his position in a casual and unsuspecting manner. At the precise moment when she gave her feet a perfunctory wipe on the mat he seized with some deftness the most bilious looking piece of cake in the collection, and slipped round the corner.

Now, if a pimply young grocer's assistant with syrup-coloured hair had not at that moment been grinning out of the door at a flashy person engaged in dressing the window of the Cash Drapery Stores opposite, all would have gone well. This young man stepped quickly aside to let the customer in, and round the ponderous contours of her back beheld the theft. Without shouting—for he was a sharp young man—he ran out on to the pavement, and was just in time to see a drab little object disappear hastily down some side-street. A policeman, who observed that this was a pursuit, came lumbering up, and broke into a stately trot. The spectacle of a policeman running attracted several other persons—an electrician's boy, a professional loafer, a sporting barman, who rushed out of his glass-doored gin-

SALVATOR STREET ♣

palace with a friend, for the purpose of making bets on the chase.

The small boy's eye caught the flash of a white apron, and, glancing round, he saw a young grocer bearing down on him with great swiftness and determination. It had been granted to few people to see a terrible grocer, but this one, advancing so silently and grimly, appeared like a devil hunting down a soul to tear to bits. The small boy set his teeth and ran. Soon he knew by the increase of commotion that not one, but a pack, was after him. He was as game as a stoat ; he led them a hellish dance through bad-smelling courts, through factory gates and timber yards ; he dropped over brick walls of cul-de-sacs ; but no use : one chased him while another went round the corner to cut him off. But he slipped between their legs, he doubled past them as they gaped and panted. The air became dark blue with policemen, or deathly white with the innumerable aprons of grocers' assistants. He could not keep back a squeal at the diabolic flapping of enormous feet on the pavement, always running, running behind him with a steady, relentless pace ; they never gave tongue ; reserving all their power for a final effort and triumphant pounce.

Now he was working nearer the river, and was afraid of being cornered in the terrible publicity of Westminster Bridge ; he meant to dive down the crowded New Cut and try his luck among the barrows of vendors of oxtails and onions ; but the haze of exhaustion, full of black spots and little flashes, came over his eyes, and his knees seemed

THE BUREAUCRAT'S SECOND TALE

to have melted away completely. Waters roared in his ears, and knives burrowed inside his chest. Flap, flap, flap, came the solemn great feet, very close to him now, and the gasps of fat men seemed to blow round his head. He felt he could no longer control his legs, but prayed passionately that they would keep it up a little longer.

At last there was a turning that appeared suddenly, for in his fear and agony he had not noticed it some way down the street; he saw the name very clear, "Salvator Street." He swerved into it abruptly, disturbing a flock of sparrows that hopped among the horse manure; then, with a sob of complete despair, he tripped and came down, rolling over several times. He lay still for some minutes, wrestling with an awful sickness and want of breath; the while he wondered why all the policemen and grocers did not pick him up. At last, when he felt a little better, he sat up and looked round him, the thick saltiness of excessive physical exertion still in his mouth. He must have run farther down the street than he thought, for the entrance was concealed by a bend.

It was a funny kind of street; he had never dreamt that there was one like it in this district. Down the middle ran a sort of garden whose trees were gold with autumn. Masses of purple crocuses and daisies grew about them, and birds sang, which astounded the small boy, whose conception of bird song was limited to the domestic bickerings of sparrows. Something warm and furry touched his cheek; it was a little brown mouse, which sat on his shoulder and washed its

SALVATOR STREET

face. Then he noticed all kinds of little nervous beasts, birds and mice and rabbits, flitting or strolling about in the most confident fashion; and people, a timorous-looking lot, it's true, but all with the same expression of infinite relief and abiding peace.

It seemed so extraordinary that for the first time in his life he felt abashed, and hesitated to accost them. But presently a boy older than himself came up and said, "'Ullo! just come 'ere?'"

The small boy recovered enough to answer, "Oh, no! been stayin' 'ere for weeks, tikin' the worters."

"'Ow did yer get in, though?" asked the other.

"Chised by cops, o' course. Cawn't fink 'ow they missed me."

"Bless yer 'art," said the older boy, "you're all right 'ere. No one comes 'ere wot does us any 'arm. I was chised 'ere by a chap wot wanted ter do me in. Fair gone with pink rats, 'e was; got as far as 'Arnsditch, and me 'ead a-buzzin' like, when I sees this 'ere street, and darn I pops."

"'Arnsditch?" said the puzzled urchin, "but I came in by Waterloo Road!"

"Ah, they all comes in different ways, and goes off again when they likes. I ain't agoin' yet, though, not 'arf!"

The small boy was too mystified to answer. He merely looked at the strange collection of those poor hunted creatures who in their hour of agony have been shown the way to the street of refuge, and held his peace. In that street the sun ever

THE BUREAUCRAT'S SECOND TALE

shone, and a warm wind came and went fitfully. Somewhere, too, but a long way off, a man was playing on a flute.

"Gorblimey!" said the policeman, "if 'e didn't disappear before these mortal heyes, I'm one Dutchman, and you're another."

"But I says 'e must 'a turned darn a side-street: yew was in front, and yew orterer kept an eye on 'im," answered the grocer wearily, for the twenty-third time.

The policeman snorted like a hippopotamus.

"Side-street?" he said; "why, there weren't no side-streets for two 'undred yards, and 'e was that close I could 'a touched 'im."

"W'y didn't yew, then?" asked the grocer nastily.

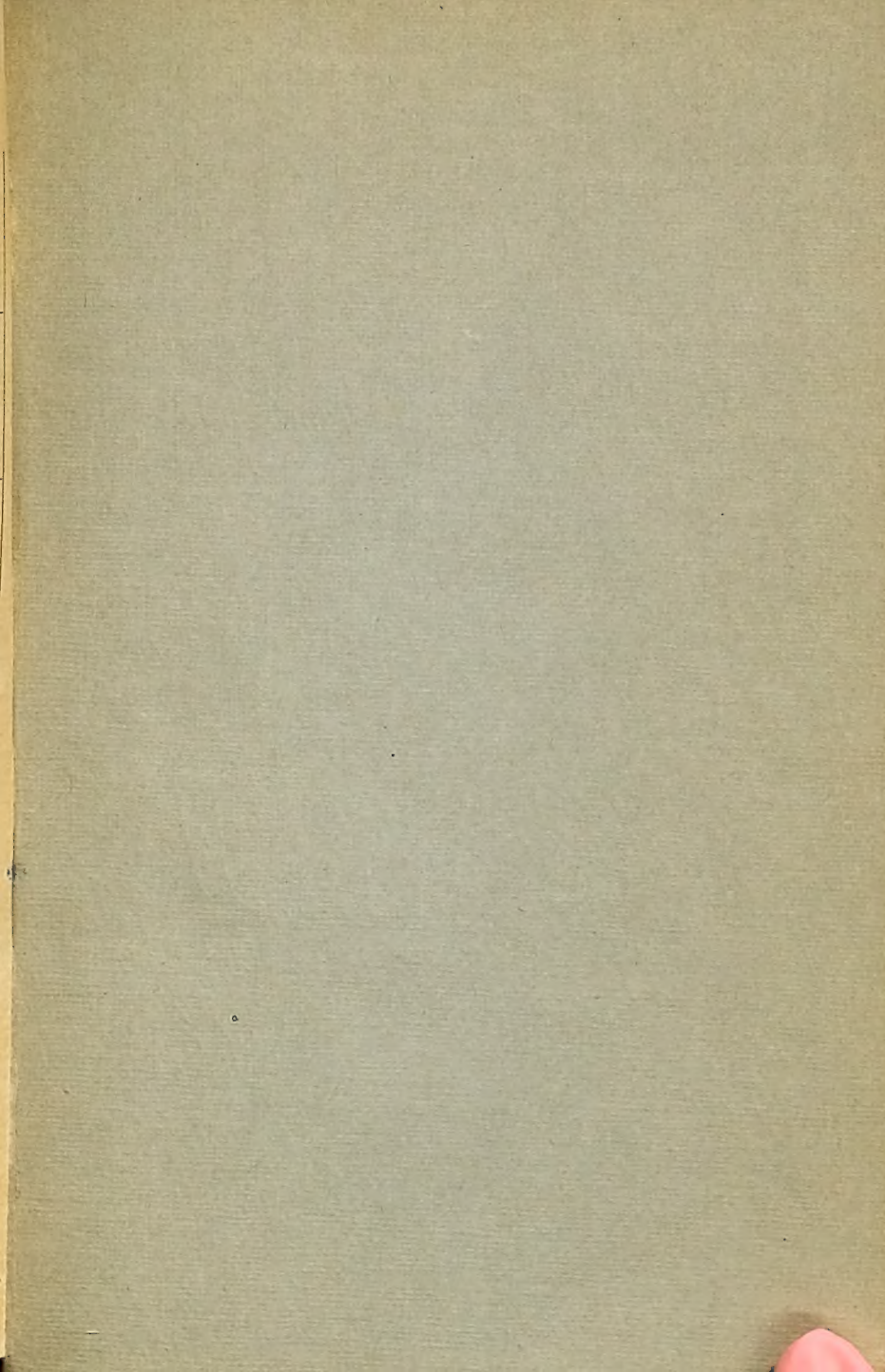
They argued about the matter for seventeen minutes, and then, with exemplary resignation, absorbed enormous portions of beer, though this was most irregular, at the corner bar.

CLIMAX

TURPIN rose to his feet.
"Is it too late for a parting song?"
he asked. "I hardly dare to look at my
watch!"

The reply was unexpected. Somewhere at the back of the château a clock began to strike, loudly. Astonished at the force of a chime unnoticed earlier in the evening, the company sat motionless, hanging on the notes Nine . . . ten . . . eleven . . . twelve . . . *thirteen!* And at the thirteenth stroke every light in the château was blotted out, leaving the bewildered tourists in what seemed impenetrable darkness.

END OF THE SECOND DAY





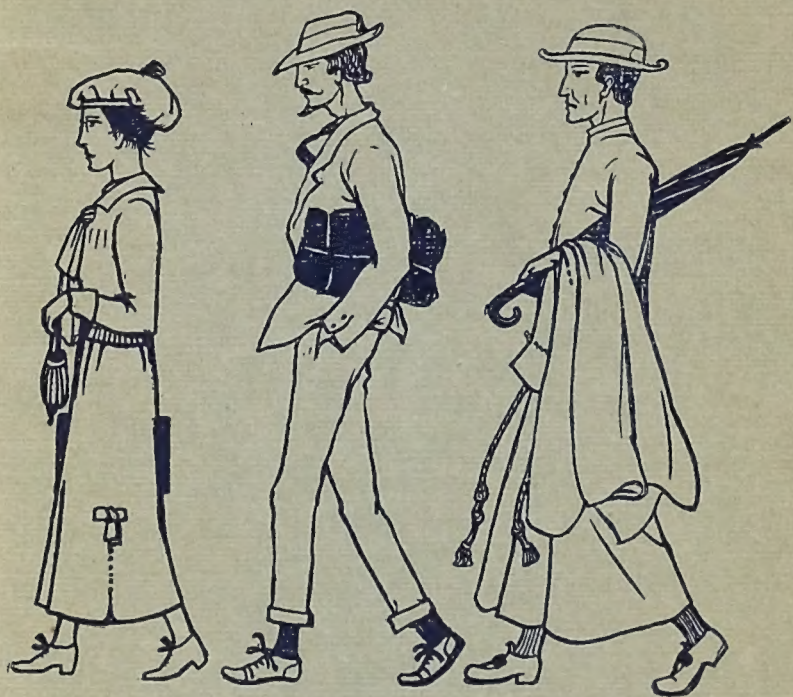
*The Woman
Doctor.*



The Professor.



*The Psychic
Researcher.*



*The
Schoolmarm.*

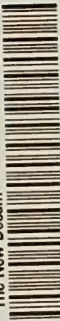
The Poet.

The Priest.

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